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MORRISON**

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# BECKETT

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9 Manchester	Stone Ground
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13 Perth	Salutation Hotel
14 Hamilton	Town Hall
17 Northampton	County Cricket Club
18 Southport	Floral Hall
19 Derby	King's Hall
20 Hull	City Hall
22 Middlesbrough	Town Hall
23 Newcastle	Polytechnic
24 Hemel Hempstead	Pavilion
26 Reading	Town Hall
27 Hanley	Victoria Hall
28 Barnsley	Civic Hall
29 Liverpool	St. George's Hall
30 Edinburgh	University

## December

1 Cromer	Links Pavilion
2 Croydon	Greyhound
3 Wolverhampton	Civic Hall
5 Blackburn	King George's Hall
8 Dagenham	Roundhouse
9 Plymouth	Guild Hall
10 Barry - Wales	Memorial Hall
11 Salisbury	City Hall
12 Sheffield	City Hall
13 Huddersfield	Polytechnic
14 Chatham	Central Hall
15 Cambridge	Corn Exchange
17 Harrogate	Royal Hall

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# VAN MORRISON OUT OF THE MUSIC



'You could forgive him anything after you've listened to his music.' Nicola Huguen-Tobler after first straining to hear the great man's words through the clinking glasses of Hotel Blah Blah, and then listening to the first side of 'Moondance'.

'That'll never make an article.' Connor McKnight, after we'd talked to Van Morrison.

'He talks through his music.' Just about everyone who has ever attempted an interview with perhaps the most individual singer produced since Alan Freed (or insert your own claimant), coined the phrase rock'n'roll (which, incidentally, is the correct way to spell it).

When considering what is to follow, the reader should bear strongly in mind the fact that I consider myself extremely fortunate to have spent half an hour with Van Morrison, and I make no apologies for the fact that you will probably find this piece lacking to a great extent the thoroughness that you may have come to expect from a ZigZag feature. Quite sincerely, I respect the man's wishes to not touch on certain fax and info type subjects, because he considers that they aren't relevant. There are less than two musicians in the world who would not leave me frustrated by such an attitude, and that one man is Van Morrison. What you have to do to appreciate him is to listen to his records, and, if you're lucky enough, see his concerts. There's very little else to say, because when it comes to a statement of what the man's about, his music speaks deafeningly loud, his rare words tell comparatively little, and that's exactly the way it ought to be, because Van Morrison's music is of a quality which is often difficult to believe. In short, if you don't like Van Morrison, perhaps you come from another planet?

So, here's a short, and not too detailed history of what we can find out about the man, at times assisted by his words, but in no way intended to detract from his music. If you've never heard any of it, stop wasting your time reading this, and go and buy some of his albums—right now.

## Them

Van didn't talk about Them at all. The contents of this portion are shamelessly unoriginal for the most part, so don't expect anything too astounding. The group consisted of Van, singing lead and playing harmonica and saxophone sometimes, Ray Elliott (organ), Alan Henderson (bass), Jim Armstrong (guitar), and David Harvey (drums). In approximately this form, they functioned from maybe 1963 to 1967, making two original LPs, a string of singles, and being the subject of a couple of later compilations.

First, let's go through the personnel. Neither Pete nor I have heard of any of the rest of Them mentioned above, except for Alan Henderson, about whom a little more later, but we believe that Peter Bardens was certainly part of the group for a while, as were Jackie Mac-Auley and his brother, whom we also believe later recorded with Kim Fowley as the Belfast Gypsies. There is also

mention of a guitar player called Billy Harrison, and Van's replacement as a vocalist, named Ken McDowell. Currently, Bardens is in Camel, who are good, but not exactly in Van Morrison's class, and the others are I know not where.

Now the records. According to a Decca 'Progressive' catalogue dated 30th April this year, you can still get 'Them' (Decca LK4700) and 'Them Again' (Decca LK4751) as full price albums, or if you're not really that much into it, 'The World of Them' (Decca SPA86) is essential for everyone's collection, containing as it does the hits ('Baby Please Don't Go', 'Here Comes The Night' and 'Gloria'), plus nine others, and all for less than a pound. There's not much more to say about the records—I'm a bad person to judge, as I spent all my time watching the Stones and the Mann-Hugg Blues Brothers featuring P.P. Jones, who were the ace London bands of the time, and I only saw Them on the box, where they didn't quite blow my mind. A few interesting snippets—Bert Berns, who briefly figures later, produced a few tracks by Them, the rear of the first album describes the group as 'The "Angry" Young Them' and on the back of the American sleeve of the second album, the advertisement showing the sleeve of the first album shows the group the wrong way round, that is, with their hair parted on the wrong side. Don't forget, folks, the world is full of left handed guitarists if you believe all that photographers show you.

There is a compilation double album of Them available in the States, and there were rumours of the same happening here, but so far, nothing has happened. No doubt somebody at Decca knows something about it, but in the best traditions of that company, he's not telling.

Now, a little story. From time to time, I descend on those few amusing record shops which sell imports at give-away prices, and come away laden with 35p albums, among which one can find examples of the work of the Happy Tiger label. One such was called 'Them' (HT1004), and of course, I grabbed it without a second thought. When I got around to a proper look, I read the following. 'Four years ago, before the great influx of rock groups from Britain formally began, Them, under the leadership of their founder, Alan Henderson, took their first trip across the ocean.' Later—'Their appeal on these releases must be attributed to the talents of all four members of Them, but special credit belongs to Alan Henderson, who formed the group, changed it, modified it and improved it over the years.'

What can I add? The group appear to have consisted of Jerry Cole (lead vocalist) and a rhythm section of Alan Henderson and, would you believe, Jerry Cole. No one else is mentioned. Let it now be known that my copy remains firmly shrink-wrapped, and will remain so until a particularly rainy day. Happily, such behaviour is not completely typical of Happy Tiger records for I have an interesting, if slightly redneck, album called 'Live at the Palomino' by Red

Rhodes and the Detours (HT1003) and Pete has a splendid thing called 'Early Chicago' (HT1017) on which you get examples of Paul Cotton (now of Poco, and once of the Illinois Speed Press), Steve Miller, H.P. Lovecraft, the Flock, the Cryan Shames, the Shadows of Knight, and even Messrs Loughnane, Pankow, Parazaidar and Lamm, who are helping out the Mauds. Who? All members of Chicago of multiple album fame.

Post Van Morrison Them had at least two album releases in the States, 'Now And Them' (Tower T5104, released February 1968), and 'Time Out, Time In, For Them' (Tower TS5116, released March 1969). I have heard neither, and don't feel that continued abstinence will do me too much harm, which puts the albums roughly in the same category as the Happy Tiger thing. End of Them.

## Bang

Not so much an explosion, more a record label, owned by Bert Berns, who has been mentioned above.

ZZ: Would you like to talk a little about Bert Berns, as he seems to have been the start of the solo phase of you? VM: I don't really know what you mean by 'phase'.

ZZ: At about this time, Freddy Scott recorded 'He Ain't Give You None', and Bert Berns had produced a few things by Them, and then you left Britain, went to the States, and signed up with Bang.

VM: Most of that stuff I can't even remember. It's so old, just sort of far away, and it doesn't really have anything to do with what I'm doing now.

ZZ: Don't you do any of the songs on stage any more, like 'Brown Eyed Girl'? VM: Yeah, but they're always different.

ZZ: Tell us a bit about Boston, because that was the first place you went. VM: No, it wasn't.

ZZ: Sorry, that was the first place that has been documented, and it seems to me that you get buzzes and flashes from places, and I wondered if you could talk a little about Boston, and what effect it had on you and your music.

VM: It's very funky. I lived in Cambridge. It's a college town, and there are a lot of funky clubs, and a lot of bars where you can see black artists, R & B performers. I don't think it had any effect on my music or anything like that. I have a lot of friends there, but that's just about it. I like Cambridge.

Right, that's all there is on Van's somewhat short career with Bang Records—at least, all that he was prepared to tell us, so let's fill in a few sketchy details. Bang Records and Shout Records were apparently brother and sister, owned by Bert Berns, who is now dead. Bert Berns will be remembered, if for nothing else, because he co-wrote 'Piece Of My Heart' with Jerry Ragovoy, and in fact recorded it for Shout with Erma Franklin (Aretha's sister), before Big Brother and Janis got hold of it. I also have a most treasured possession from the Shout label, an album by Freddie Scott, a very soulful singer, and one which ranks equally for me with 'Otis Blue' as the finest soul album to

come out of that astonishing mid sixties period when soul was the music to be into. Subsequent to his album 'Are You Lonely For Me?' Freddie recorded 'He Ain't Give You None', which was written by Van Morrison, and a single of it came out on London here at that time, although subsequently the Shout/Bang catalogue was acquired by President Records, who released the Freddie Scott album last year. London also released 'Blowin' Your Mind', which was the first Van Morrison solo album, under license from Bang. That was in 1968, and practically nobody bought it, a thing we're all regretting now, as import prices are a bit steep, even if you are getting gold dust. So, what do you get with 'Blowin' Your Mind'? Well, it starts off with a hit single (top ten in the States) called 'Brown Eyed Girl', which is nothing short of fabulous, and continues with 'He Ain't Give You None' which is longer, but equally good, and finishes off the first side with 'T.B. Sheets' which is longer again, but equally good. It is difficult to exercise one's critical faculties where Van Morrison is concerned, due to the fact that superlatives are the only available words. Mind you, I'm not half so keen on the second side, which only has two songs out of five on which I'm totally sold, so I'm merely ecstatic about three quarters of the album. It's fair to say that the production techniques used are by no means those we have come to expect more recently from a Van Morrison album, but then that's a bit too much to expect from a five year old record.

According to a piece in 'Rolling Stone' (June 22, 1972, by John Gris-sim), Van wasn't mad about 'Blowin' Your Mind', and phrases like 'artistic freedom' were bandied about, together with the fact that Van didn't know that what he had cut was intended as an album. In fact, he thought that there wasn't enough for an album. The felony, if such it was, was compounded by a later album on Bang called 'The Best of Van Morrison', which it surely isn't, claiming five unreleased songs (true) and one alternate take (untrue). None of the new tracks are up to much and presumably in their eagerness to get the record out, they've missed a track called 'Chick-A-Boom' which I believe to be the B side of the follow up single to 'Brown Eyed Girl', which was 'Ro-Ro-Rosey'. Now there is a rare track, I reckon.

A quick resume of what you can buy is due, I think. 'Blowin' Your Mind' can be purchased at most good import shops on Bang BLB 218. The London version of this comes up occasionally, but President, who own the British rights, haven't put it out since it was deleted on London. It may not be too far from the truth to think that they don't know they have the rights, because I can't see them missing a potential crust. However, they did put out 'The Best Of Van Morrison' on President PTL51045, and I think it's still available. As is the Freddy Scott album, on Joy JOYS215.



## Astral Weeks

The record that perhaps personified best the early days of getting stoned. I've no idea if such was the intention, but flower power people bought import copies of this album in veritable droves, and it wasn't until several months later that the newly independent Warner Bros Records put it out, having lost maybe five thousand sales to the importers. So what was it about 'Astral Weeks'?

ZZ: How did you come to sign with Warner Bros? Did Bang let you go, because they presumably stopped functioning when Bert Berns died?

VM: I really don't know. Once I was off the label, I wasn't interested in what they were doing. I just got a call from Joe Smith of Warner Bros.

ZZ: The 'Astral Weeks' musicians were generally session men that you assembled for that particular record, weren't they?

VM: Yes, all except for the flute player, John Payne.

John Platania (JP): Jay Berliner, the guitarist, has a couple of albums out now, jazz type albums.

A quick amplification. The musicians credited were Jay Berliner (guitar), Richard Davis (bass), Connie Kay (drums), John Payne (flute, sax), and Warren Smith Jr (percussion and vibes). Connie Kay, Van told us, still works with the Modern Jazz Quartet, as he has for some years now, and I'm sure I recall Richard Davis as a jazz oriented studio musician from somewhere. John Payne crops up a couple of times in my collection at least. One the exceedingly helpful and interesting sleeve note to Bonnie Raitt's 'Give It Up' album, we are told that John lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and works with Cambridge singer-songwriter Peter Johnson and his brother, Hunter Payne. By the way, Bonnie Raitt's is a good album. Then John Payne is also on 'Andy Pratt', that man's astonishing first CBS album, which includes 'Avenging Annie'. The only Warren Smith that Pete and I know of was a very hard rocker who recorded for Sun in the fifties, and we feel that it's unlikely to be the same bloke.

ZZ: Did the American copies of 'Astral Weeks' have lyrics in them?

VM: No. They said they were going to put them in, but when it came down to it, they didn't. That was the production company or something.

ZZ: Is there a songbook?

VM: The songbook is all inclusive of most of the albums.

Yes, you can get it here. I got mine from Music Sales, who advertise in the Melody Maker, and it contains all the songs on the first three Warner Bros albums, plus 'Brown Eyed Girl', and it cost me £2.10p.

ZZ: You were quoted as having said that there is a gulf between 'Astral Weeks' and the work you were doing before that.

VM: In terms of what—a gap?

ZZ: Yes, sort of changing material overnight, the whole process of gestation. That the music of 'Astral Weeks' had

been in you for ages, and I wondered how long you had been waiting to do it.

VM: Maybe three or four years. It's like you may be doing twelve different things, and then one of them may be an album at a given time. An album doesn't mark for me any kind of style or any kind of format, or creatively what I was doing at that time—an album can't say it. An album is average twenty minutes each side—you know, you've got forty minutes of what you can put on a record, and you may be doing a lot more than that; usually you are, but you can't put it all on one album. An album is no direction an album is just simply an album, what it is when you record it. It's mixed on to a two track, and then it's made into a record, and that's an album as far as I'm concerned. It doesn't have anything to do with anything really, it's not a definitive statement.

ZZ: There are always stories about twenty-five minute tracks which were maybe going to be on 'Astral Weeks', and I'm sure among our readers, there is a hell of a curiosity about what the material was like that you didn't put on the album.

VM: There were some blues things, up-town blue jazz, a lot of different things. There were a couple of things I wrote at that time. One of them was about Jesse James and another was a long saga about trains. I don't think you can ever get everything on to an album. It's very hard to do your number in forty minutes, so you always have stuff in the can. ZZ: How do you feel about the people who regarded 'Astral Weeks' as almost Messianic?

VM: I think it's all in your head.

ZZ: The thing that gets to me is that sometimes it gets in the way of the music if you regard a musician as a figure offering some kind of profound wisdom instead of just making his music. VM: That's the whole shoot, that's what people do. It's ridiculous. People think that because you make a record, you know more than they do or some thing. It's just too ridiculous.

ZZ: I think that music is a sensual thing, like sunshine, to be enjoyed. Maybe it's a good thing that you didn't supply the lyrics, because I can imagine people, rather than just enjoying the poetry and the images, getting into some kind of weird philosophy.

Stories appear to be legion concerning the sort of behaviour indulged in by those who were and are 'Astral Weeks' freaks, but I don't think there's too much point in going into them in too much detail, so I won't bother at all, and perhaps I'll confine myself to recording my feelings about the record, hearing it again in detail after five years (because I have to admit that I wasn't totally grabbed the first time round, five years ago).

The thing that's most striking is the position and purity of the backing and the arrangements, apart from the obvious excellence of the vocals, and, for the most part, the songs. Each instrument is given just the correct amount of room, and is placed in exactly the

right position, neither too far forward nor too far back. Thus, where Richard Davis' bass lines are meant to be heard clearly, as in 'Cypress Avenue' and 'Madam George' (spellings taken from the song book, which may blow the odd mind), you can hear the astonishing lines he's putting down, and Jay Berliner can be heard to the same excellent effect on 'Sweet Thing' and the title track. The singing is, as usual, quite superb, particularly on the repetitive 'love the love that loves to love' scat passage at the end of 'Madam George', and the only thing that I didn't totally care for were two of the songs, 'Beside You' and 'The Way Young Lovers Do', which I found must untypically messy, which is in no way an adjective that would normally spring to mind in considering Van Morrison's work. Everything else is as good as you'd ever want it to be, although I'm not sure that I don't prefer the Johnny Rivers interpretation of 'Slim Slo Slider', which is the title track of a now deleted 1970 album, the number of which is (or was) Liberty LBS 83383.

ZZ: Can I ask you about Johnny Rivers, and the way he interprets your songs, because he's done quite a number of them?

VM: I dig the way he does it, because he kind of does them like himself, he doesn't try to do them like anybody else.

No more. If you don't have 'Astral Weeks', you should go out and buy it.

## Moondance

This record contains, in its first side, a contender for the title of the most perfectly programmed album side of all time.

ZZ: On the first side of 'Moondance', all the songs seem to lead into each other. Is that the way you record, or do you just conceive it that way, and actually re-arrange the order of the songs?

VM: That was all worked out afterwards.

ZZ: Was that true of 'Astral Weeks' as well?

VM: Yes.

On 'Moondance', the musicians are totally different from those on 'Astral Weeks', consisting of Jack Schroer (alto and soprano sax), Collin Tillton (tenor sax and flute), Jeff Labes (keyboards), John Platania (guitar), John Klingberg (bass), Gary Malabar (drums) and Guy Masson (conga), with backing vocals by Emily Houston, Judy Clay and Jackie Verdell. These ladies are not known to me elsewhere, with the exception of Judy Clay, who you should remember for her classic single with William Bell, 'Private Number', and some more obscure, but equally good duets for Atlantic with Billy Vera like 'Storybook Children' and 'Just Across The Line'. Reverting to the musicians, I can't find any traces of Jeff Labes, John Klingberg or Guy Masson in contexts other than Van Morrison, but Gary Malabar does some of the drumming on Steve Miller's 'Recall The Beginning . . . A Journey From Eden' album.

ZZ: John [Platania] has been with you since 'Moondance', right?

VM: Before then, between 'Astral Weeks' and 'Moondance'.

ZZ: Where did you come from before you were playing with Van, because we'd never heard of you, and then suddenly you're making incredible records . . .

VM: He comes from Poughkeepsie.

JP: Somebody arranged an audition, I was playing in a group, then a guy named Tom Reynolds arranged an audition for the band, and I just jammed and played.

ZZ: Were you trying to make up a band for gigs, or just for recording?

VM: Both.

ZZ: Do you like playing with Van?

JP: I dig the music, he treats me well, and we've been together for a long time.

ZZ: Do you ever do anything else?

JP: Yes, I do a lot of session work. People like Genya Ravan, Chip Taylor, Don Cooper, and I do a lot of stuff with Bernard Purdie. Elliot Schelner, the engineer on 'Moondance' gets me a lot of sessions.

Genya Ravan was once known as Goldie Zelkowitz and ran a fairly successful all girl group in Britain in the mid sixties called Goldie and the Ginger-breads, who had a near hit with a song called 'Can't You Hear My Heartbeat?' Bear in mind that this pre-dated Fanny, Birtha, etc by some five years or more. Chip Taylor is primarily a songwriter,

and among his compositions are 'Wild Thing' and 'Angel of the Morning', as well as the two Billy Vera/Judy Clay tracks mentioned earlier. To my knowledge, he has also made two albums for Buddah as one third of Gorgoni, Martin and Taylor, and more recently, a solo album called 'Gasoline', which indeed features John Platania. 'Pretty' Purdie is an ace soul type drummer, and has appeared on a whole heap of classic albums, most notably, in my collection, on several King Curtis LPs. Then we come to Jack Schroer and Collin Tillton. They were previously in the Colwell-Winfield Blues Band, who brought out an import album called 'Cold Wind Blows' on Verve-Forecast in 1968. It's a very competent record, and the two saxophonists show what they're going to be capable of, particularly Schroer, who is even now still with Van Morrison, and has probably taken over from King Curtis in my mind as the greatest living saxophone player. You can also find a trace of his playing on Boz Scaggs' 'My Time' album.

I will now say again that the first side of 'Moondance' is quite perfect. At least four of the five songs are so good that if you were to write one of them in a lifetime, you'd be a genius. Van Morrison gets them all on one side of an LP. The highlights are too many to spoil for you, so I'll just give you the three obvious bits. First, Schroer's beautiful saxophone

twiddles on 'And It Stoned Me', then Platania's early understatement of the hook phrase in 'Caravan', and finally Schroer's foghorn sax and Platania's superlative guitar fills on 'Into the Mystic'. I cannot tell you too strongly just how extra-terrestrially brilliant it all is, and you just have to hear. This is going to get monotonous, but it really is that important.

ZZ: The American sleeve for 'Moondance' was a gatefold, plus photographs and everything, but over here, it was just an ordinary sleeve, which is a bit sad. Were you annoyed or pissed off?

VM: When they told me, I wondered why they did it. It was a fold-out, and I thought it was going to be a fold-out here.

ZZ: On 'Crazy Love', you use a kind of half falsetto, a slightly falsetto voice. Was that instinctive, or did you actually think about it beforehand? Or did you just walk in and do the vocal higher and more back towards the throat?

VM: I think maybe I thought about it half an hour before.

All right, by now you should have played the first side, and if you didn't find it quite brilliant, you don't deserve to possess a record player. Nothing should stop you from going straight on with side two, and there I'm sure you'll notice the sax twiddles again on 'These Dreams Of You', and the fact that John Platania is at his most potent on a slower





number like 'Brand New Day' probably won't escape you. By the time you get to the last two tracks, 'Everyone' and 'Glad Tidings', it should have registered that 'Moondance' is one of the most joyful albums that you've ever heard, not to mention that there isn't anything even faintly qualifying as a bum note on the whole record. Everything is done with enormous care and taste, like the conga start to 'Glad Tidings' and the easy boogie tempo used in 'These Dreams Of You'. There's much food for thought in the fact that a record prepared with such care is all too often the exception, rather than the rule. The credits on 'Astral Weeks' say 'Produced by Lewis Merenstein' and on 'Moondance', 'Producer—Van Morrison: Executive Producer—Lewis Merenstein'.

ZZ: Is what is said on the record correct, or did you produce 'Astral Weeks'?

VM: Well, you can say that. It all depends what you mean by producing.

JP: The creative thing was Van.

VM: He was a kind of executive producer, who is an ex-engineer.

I'm now drained of superlatives, so I'm going to bed to recharge. But first, I think I'll just play side one again . . .

## The Street Choir

With a title like that, we first of all need to go through the personnel, so let's do that. First, those who have appeared on previous Van Morrison albums, comprising Jack Schroer, John Platania, John Klingberg, and the lady vocal trio who were marginally featured on 'Moondance'. ZZ: There's a track on here which looks as if it was recorded at the same time as 'Moondance'.

VM: No.

ZZ: It has the same backup singers as on the earlier album.

VM: Well, it was recorded at a different time. We just brought them in to do that one.

The new musicians on this album are Dahaud Elias Shaar (drums and bass clarinet), Keith Johnson (trumpet and organ) and Alan Hand (keyboards), plus The Street Choir, which was Mrs Morrison, Mrs Schroer, Martha Velez, David Shaw, Andy Robinson and Larry Goldsmith. And their other activities? This time, our knowledge is failing a bit, as there's no file in my head or filing cabinet for Messrs Hand or Shaar, but Keith Johnson certainly played for a while in the Butterfield Blues Band, although not at the time when the band was at its most productive. Martha Velez has had a solo album released here twice. The first time, it was called 'Fiends And Angels' and the second time, 'Fiends And Devils Again', when it was on Blue Horizon. The record is fine, but Martha tends to get overshadowed by the sleeve note, which credits several coachloads of British blues stars, from Clapton downwards, quite literally. Perhaps a classic case of too many dogs spoiling the rabbit, or overkill as we call it in trendy maga-

zines. Now, is David Shaw a person not dissimilar to Dahaud Elias Sharr? The omniscient Melody Maker mentioned both names as being the drummer in Van's recent touring group.

ZZ: So Jack Schroer is part of your formal group?

VM: It's known as the Caledonia Soul Orchestra.

ZZ: A sort of successor to the Band and Street Choir?

VM: No, it's not a successor to anything. It's just what it is. Mostly the same people actually.

ZZ: Which musicians do you have with you on this tour?

VM: John here [Platania] on guitar, Jack Schroer on sax, Bill Atwood on trumpet, David Shaw [or was it Shaar?] on drums, Jeff Labes on piano, David Hayes on bass, Nathan Rubin on violin, Terry Adams [Theresa] on cello, Nancy Ellis viola and Tom Kovacs violin.

ZZ [Prior, you understand, to writing this]: Not many of those have played on your records, have they?

VM: Yes, on the last album. John and Dave and Jack and Jeff played on a lot of albums together, and played a lot of gigs together.

ZZ: The string section is somewhat of a new thing for you . . .

VM: I've worked with that instrumentation on records before. It's not that new really.

ZZ: Well, we don't know what you're like playing live, because you haven't been here.

A cry from the heart indeed. And on to the record.

It's always difficult to follow a masterpiece with something which will appear equally strong to those who acclaimed the original masterpiece, and that's where I find the failings in 'His Band And Street Choir'. Mind you, it doesn't start off like any sort of anticlimax, and that's in no way the impression I'm trying to give, by the way. The first track is a sublime piece of work that is and was eminently suitable for a single, and did pretty well when it was released as such. It's 'Domino', in which is encapsulated everything that is missing from the very vast majority of 1973's nasty hit singles. The best thing in it for me is the unforgettable sax passage, which seems to be as perfect as most of those Stax soul riffs which eat you when hear them. Here, it's quite perfect, but still has a hard job standing out among the other highlights, like the cymbal snaps and the glorious vocal. In short, an exceptional way to start off a record, but, for me at least, the main highlight comes too soon. Not that the rest of it is by any means bad, and there's still a heap of highlights to be mentioned, like the rising instrumental passage in 'I've Been Workin'' which swells as Van sings 'woman, woman, woman', or the sax and trumpet interludes which destroy me so much when I hear them, but always leave you waiting for more, and never allow you to tire of them, or the compulsive chorus to 'Call Me Up In Dreamland', or the Tijuana trumpet solo in 'Blue Money'. And I could still very likely go

on for hours. As I said before, a masterpiece is very difficult to follow, and had this LP come before 'Moondance', I'm pretty sure I wouldn't be treating it this way. Even so, I'm willing to bet that this record, even if it's inferior to 'Moondance', is still better than eighty per cent of the records you've got in your collection.

## Tupelo Honey

Late 1971, as 'Band And Street Choir' was early 1971. Just for a change, let's start with the sleeve, which shows Van and his lady in beautifully pastoral surroundings, with horses, cats, woods and fields, fences and corrals.

ZZ: You have a farm, don't you?

VM: No, I don't have a farm, and I don't live in the country.

ZZ: Oh, I'm sorry. From this sleeve, I thought you did.

VM: That was taken at a stable, and I didn't live there. We just went there and took the picture and split. A lot of people seem to think that album covers are your life or something.

Once again, the musicians have changed around, and this time the only previously used players are Jack Schroer, Connie Kay and Gary Mallaber, who're joined by Ronnie Montrose (guitar), who is now part of the Edgar Winter Group (you can see a nice photo of Ronnie on the inside sleeve of 'They Only Come Out At Night'), Bill Church (bass), Rick Schlosser (drums), who you can also find on Link Wray's 'Be What You Want To' album, and both Andy Pratt albums. Mark Jordan, who is now, I believe, the keyboard player with Dave Mason, Luis Gasca on trumpet and two flute players, Boots Stuart Houston and Bruce Royston. And that's not quite all . . .

ZZ: John McFee, the pedal steel player from Clover. Are they still functioning, because I proudly possess their two albums?

VM: So do I. John's really good. They play in the Bay Area all the time. They're a really good group, and I think they should be bigger than they are.

The producer and organ player of 'Tupelo Honey' (producing jointly with Van himself) was Ted Templeman, who has also produced some of the other ZigZag heroes, like Captain Beefheart, the Doobie Bros, and Little Feat. He was also, would you believe, one of Harper's Bizarre, a very fine harmony band of the sixties, and a band which boasts an often played album in my collection.

ZZ: How about Ted Templeman?

JP: He's a technical adviser.

VM: Yeah, he's kind of technical—into the mixing, and stuff like that, and the ways it sounds.

The background vocalists are always important on Van's records, an integral part like every other part, and here Mrs Morrison and Mrs Shroer are joined by Ronnie Montrose, Boots Stuart Houston and Van himself.

I have typed several hundred words in this paragraph without mentioning the music. This was a duty I set myself, as otherwise, my enthusiasm for parts of

the music would have totally obliterated anything else I had to say, and in fact, I'd very likely have scrawled the two words 'streamline promenade' all over everything thus far and just given up. Such behaviour is perhaps not too easily explained, but there is a track on here which is my all time fave Van Morrison track, and if you think of what I've mentioned before as being superlative in relation to Van Morrison, you will perhaps appreciate my ardour and zeal for this track, 'Moonshine Whiskey', about which I go absolutely bananas.

VM: I think I had that in mind for Janis Joplin or something . . . Southern Comfort and all that. I can't remember.

ZZ: Do you do it on stage?

VM: Yes.

He didn't, but to see 'Moonshine Whiskey' performed live would have rendered me speechless for several weeks, and from that point of view, I suppose I'm glad I didn't hear it, although, of course, others have been less amused. But how do you describe the indescribable? There are several discrete parts to the song, which is just the most joyful I've ever heard—a sheer 22 carat gold track. Everything about it is a joy, from Van's bubble blowing as he impersonates the fish performing his streamline promenade, to Schroer's triumphant sax which projects rather than wails towards the end, to the beautiful guitar and steel fills before each hook line. It makes me weak to write about it, and it'll blow your mind if you don't know it already. If all music were as good as this, there would be no need for anybody to make any more, because this is the real thing. Just try it and see.

It should be fairly obvious that the rest of the album is somewhat overshadowed for me, but you should also listen to the title track, 'Tupelo Honey', which is just a beautiful love song. I suppose that every woman would wish that some day someone would write a song like this for her. Just listen and you'll understand. I just can't judge the rest of it well enough, but we did ask about another track on the album.

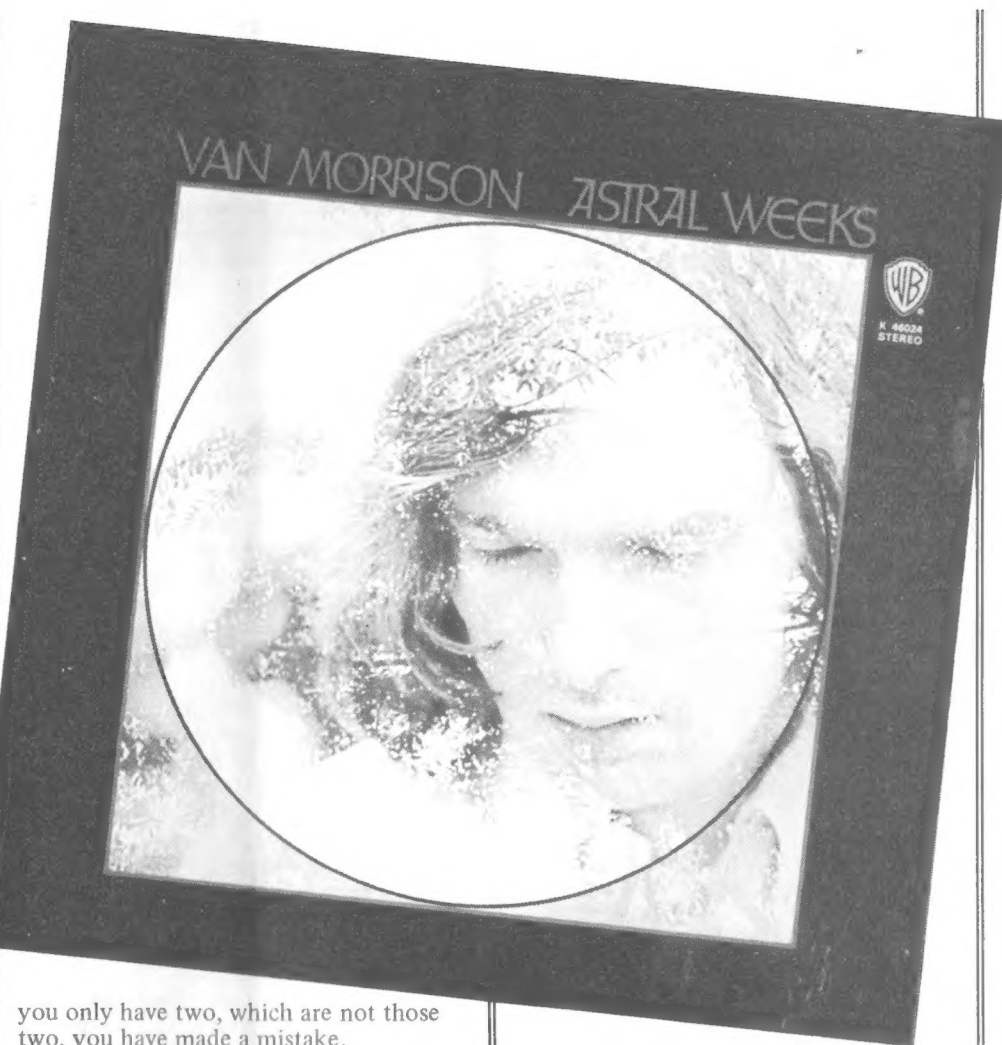
ZZ: What does this mean—'I Wanna Roo You (Scottish derivative)'?

VM: I really don't know what it means. Ted Templeman said it was a Scottish derivative, so I put that on the end. I trusted him, I said that if he looked it up in the dictionary, he must be right. But I don't know what the hell it means. I called up Ted, and I said I didn't know what the song meant. He got a dictionary and looked it up, and said it's a Scottish derivative.

Actually, it's a pretty good track too. And on the same side as 'Moonshine Whiskey' and 'Tupelo Honey', so why don't you take a break and play that side?

## St Dominic's

This was one of the best three or four LPs released in 1972, and you should have it. If you only possess two Van Morrison albums, they should be 'Moondance' and 'St Dominic's Preview'. If



you only have two, which are not those two, you have made a mistake.

This is also an album with a bigger cast than those previous. First of all, the people who've appeared before, who are as follows. Jack Schroer (sax), 'Boots' Rolf Houston (sax and backing vocals), who had apparently changed his middle name from Stuart between albums, Bill Church (bass), Rick Schlosser (drums), Janet Planet and Ellen Schroer (backing vocals), Gary Mallaber (drums and vibes), which is an alternative spelling of his name, Ronnie Montrose (guitar, backing vocals), Mark Jordan (another alternative spelling) (piano), Connie Kay (drums), John McFee (steel guitar) and naturally Van himself.

ZZ: You've got Leroy Vinnegar on bass on one track. He's very old, I'm told.

VM: Yeah, he's on one thing. He's not old in spirit. Maybe old in years, but it doesn't show, and he's a lively cat. Do you mean like bebop-wise or something?

ZZ: Well, he was in the Shelly Manne Trio who did 'My Fair Lady', wasn't he?

VM: Right, but he plays everything; like we cut some country and western. He can play anything. He's a very up person.

ZZ: Mark Naftalin is another Butterfield bloke . . .

VM: He does sessions in the San Francisco area and LA.

ZZ: Is the Ron Elliott who plays on 'Almost Independence Day' the same one who was in the Beau Brummels?

VM: Yes.

ZZ: And how did you meet Bernie Krause, the moog player?

VM: I bought this album called 'Gand-

harva' that was recorded in a cathedral, and I saw his name on it. I needed a moog, and a friend of mine had played drums on 'Gandharva', so he put me in touch with him.

Now the inevitable tidying up. Mark Naftalin is currently doing something with Mike Bloomfield, although he has of course spent time in Mother Earth and done sessions for dozens of people too numerous to note here. The majority of the guitar playing on the album is by Doug Messenger, who I'm unable to trace elsewhere, but he's good, so watch out for him. Jack Schroer is joined on saxophone by Jules Broussard for this album, and Jules can also be heard on 'My Time' by Boz Scaggs and 'Be What You Want To' by Link Wray, which also contains Tom Salisbury (keyboards) and several others like Jack Schroer and John McFee. Trombone on 'St Dominic's' is played by Pat O'Hara, who you can also hear on 'Moments' and 'Boz Scaggs and Band' by Boz Scaggs, of course. Again, there's a lot of cross usage, if you like, because 'Moments' also contains Bill Atwood and John McFee, and 'Boz Scaggs and Band' boasts Lee Charlton, who plays drums on one track of 'St Dominic's'. Mark Springer, of whom I know nothing else, does some backing vocals, and the only other new one is Bernie Krause. The album that was mentioned is a thing of great beauty, and of course, it has Ronnie Montrose playing on it, plus



Lee Charlton, who is presumably the drummer that Van mentioned. The album in fact bears the names of Paul Beaver and Bernie Krause, and has Gerry Mulligan and Mike Bloomfield blowing on it. It's an album which uses a cathedral pipe organ, plus moogs and so on, and is an extremely restful and relaxing record, to which you are recommended. Beaver and Krause are perhaps the kings of the moog, and one of their early projects was 'The Nonesuch Guide To Electronic Music', which is a sometimes scholarly, but most informative double album which has recently been put out by the excellent Transatlantic, who are the first British outlet to treat Nonesuch as the important record company it undoubtedly is. On the rear sleeve of 'Gandharva' is a note about some of the people that B and K have done sessions for, which speaks for itself, and includes fourteen ZigZag heroes. Pete feels that I should mention the voice effects on 'Save The Life Of My Child' which is on Simon and Garfunkel's 'Bookends', and also the work on 'Space Odyssey' from 'The Notorious Byrd Brothers'.

ZZ: What about your expressed admiration for Jackie Wilson? Does that still hold good, or was it just a good name to put in the song?

VM: I always dig Jackie Wilson, and I have dug him for a long time. It's just a line from a song he did, a song called 'Reet Petite', a long time ago. That was that.

I'm not too sure whether Van meant that the hook line of 'Jackie Wilson Said', which is 'I'm In Heaven When You Smile' is in 'Reet Petite', but I certainly can't hear it on my copy. However, Van does use the words 'Reet Petite' in his song.

ZZ: The song that I couldn't understand on 'St Dominic's' was 'I Will Be There'. I thought it was a good song, but less special than most of your material. What was the reason for doing that, because I felt that it was a very straight Joe Turner sort of thing?

JP: Maybe you're talking about the lyrics. Some are very poetic, and some are just . . .

ZZ: The tune was very straight ahead.

VM: I don't know. All I can remember is that I wrote it on piano.

ZZ: Is the track 'St Dominic's Preview' like Halloween Eve or something?

VM: No, not really. What do you mean?

ZZ: Without the lyrics, I'm not totally sure what it's all about.

VM: Well, to tell the truth, I wasn't totally sure what it was all about myself until after I did it, and after I did it, I found out what it was about, that it was more a stream of consciousness. There are songs like that, and there are songs that you know what they're about right away.

JP: That's the difference between songs like that, and songs like 'I Will Be There'.

ZZ: I can't recall that you've ever written a song about being a musician. There are a lot of musicians who write about their career, and I always think they must have a really dull life if that's the only thing they can write about.

VM: 'Hard Nose The Highway' is about that.

ZZ: Isn't 'St Dominic's Preview' about that, with 'the record company paying for the wine'?

VM: It kind of touches on it, but just slightly. That's more about all the party people who hang out and make the scene, doing their number on you.

ZZ: Isn't there some story about you having a dream about a church called 'St Dominic's'?

VM: Yeah, that was in the 'Rolling Stone' thing, but I didn't have a dream. That guy was using his imagination rather heavily. He said that I had a dream about a mass in church. I didn't have a dream—the only thing that happened was I mentioned to him that I'd seen in the paper that there was a service in St Dominic's in San Francisco. That was all I said, and he did the rest. This was after I wrote the song. I just mentioned I saw the name in a paper, and he made up the rest.

ZZ: One gets the impression that you have a slight aversion to journalists. Is it because of things like that?

VM: Yeah, because of things like that. Because the guy said he was gonna—he taped an interview, and he gave me his word that he was going to print it exactly word for word off the tape, and you know when it came out, it was all changed around. It was like his book or something, and didn't have much to do with me or the interview.

Let's hope Van doesn't find anything to complain about in this piece. It was my intention to provide several hundred relevant, informative and inspiring words concerning 'St Dominic's Preview', but I find that I know the record just too well to do that. So you'll just have to make do with my feeling that this is a near perfect album which still delights and surprises me more than a year after I first heard it. Five of the seven tracks are quite magnificent, those being 'Gypsy' and 'Listen To The Lion' on side one, plus the whole of the second side. The other two tracks, as already mentioned, are somewhat simpler pieces, and it occurs to me that maybe I wouldn't like the record as much if they weren't there. But you should, you really should, get down and listen to this album, because you're missing something you'll regret if you don't. A masterpiece, pure and simple.

## Hard Nose The Highway

The latest, but not for me the greatest, album by Van Morrison. You'll no doubt have perceived, and even perhaps complained about, the fact that no attempt was really made either to ask Van what his songs were about, or to attempt the impossible and make generalised and pompous statements about their meaning. With that in mind, it's interesting to note that 'Hard Nose The Highway' is the first album which includes printed lyrics, although even one of those is missing. So you can read the words, and just for once relate them to each other,

rather than treating lyrics as just an additional instrumental feature, which is what normally happens to me, because I find the words relatively unimportant when related to the whole presence of a Van Morrison song. After all, the best Van Morrison tracks have no particular reliance on one facet or sound—they're the perfect example of what a co-operative arrangement can turn into. So, without committing myself, and especially without trying to put the point over to the reader, it's my feeling that we have here a record with a message. No longer does the music penetrate your mind and body with warmth and beauty to the same extent, and I feel that Van wants us to listen much more carefully to what he has to say. Again, I'm not about to tell you what it's all about, but my impression is of two particular things that seem to be put over. The first is the beauty of nature, and the second the harshness of the world, with particular autobiographical references. In the former category are the monumental 'Autumn Song', ten and a half minutes of almost soporific relaxation with a gentle jazzy backing, 'Purple Heather', which seems to be not unrelated verbally to the traditional 'Wild Mountain Thyme', 'Warm Love', which is a second cousin to 'Crazy Love' and nearly as good, with its brilliant line 'and it's everpresent everywhere', and perhaps in retrospect, 'Snow In San Anselmo', where it only occurs to you after you've heard the other songs mentioned. Then there's the bitterness, typified by 'The Great Deception', which seems to be a sort of summary of what Van is pissed off by. Some of the sequences described are fairly obvious in relation to their subject matter, others less so. If you want to know to whom they refer, you'll have to ask him yourself. 'Hard Nose The Highway', you'll recall, was said to be about being a musician, and I suppose that could be so, although there may be some veiled references to other topics in there. 'Wild Children' is interesting to me, about what Phillip Goodhand-Tait has called the 'Children Of The Last War', with references to Tennessee Williams, Brando, Steiger and James Dean, and, it seems to me, the suggestion that the two living film stars were in some way aligned with the late Mr Dean, a concept of which I cannot confess any previous knowledge. The only other track is 'Green', the first track to be written by another writer on any Morrison album since 'Blowin' Your Mind'. Ah yes, before I forget, one of the tracks on that album was a co-composition of Bert Berns and one Wes Farrell, who has more recently achieved far greater fame as producer of one David Cassidy.

Back to 'Green', which was written by one Joe Raposo, of whom I know nothing, apart from the fact that he has written a lovely song here, which is perhaps vaguely parallel to 'Where Does Brown Begin?' No doubt it's an allegorical song in many more ways than the obvious, but maybe Van likes it because so many different sorts of people will



make so many different judgements about it. For example, green is inexperienced, but the song also says that green's the colour of ordinary because most things in nature are green. So there's the beauty of nature part of the song, and there's a trace of the harshness there too, I think. I like to think that 'Green' is the unifying factor of the record. There again, I'm probably talking rubbish.

So, to the musicians. Horns are played by Jack Schroer, Jules Broussard, Bill Atwood and Joseph Ellis. The last man is new, but I know nothing else about him. Piano is Jeff Labes, guitar is John Platania, bass David Hayes and Marty David (no info), drums Gary

Mallaber and Rick Schlosser, plus a string section, three of whom were mentioned earlier as being in the Caledonia Soul Orchestra. On 'Snow In San Anselmo', the Oakland Symphony Chamber Chorus soar high above the instruments, and presumably are one of the largest backing vocal groups ever assembled. On some other tracks, Jackie DeShannon does the vocal backups.

ZZ: I believe that you're producing Jackie DeShannon currently?

VM: Not right now, that was a while ago. I produced four sides for Atlantic, and that was it.

ZZ: Is that the first person you've produced other than yourself?

VM: Yes.

ZZ: Haven't you been asked before?

VM: Yes, I've been asked before, but I don't really dig producing people. I can't see myself fitting into that category. It's a dangerous game.

ZZ: I suppose one could say why should you use your own good ideas on somebody else's material?

VM: You could say that.

OK, that's the end of the records. If you don't have any, I can only reiterate that you really shouldn't be reading this, because all I can write can only be a very minor adjunct to the main thing, which is the music. One thing, you'll never be let down by a Van Morrison record.



## Bits And Pieces

We (that is, Connor and I, who did the interview) asked quite a lot of other questions. In the final part of this piece appears a distillation of what we said. And before you can make the criticism, it's in no particular order, and is supposed to be nothing other than a short conversation piece.

ZZ: You've been quoted as saying that you do most of your production work yourself, and also that you tend to work very, very fast.

VM: Yeah, I think that if there's something to put down, you have to go in and take care of it when it's happening.

JP: It's fast in the sense that if there's a take that's magical, we'll keep it, whereas a lot of other people do a cut and keep doing it, forgetting about the magic.

They'll go for a flawless track and lose that magic, and make it a mechanical thing.

VM: There is no over production.

ZZ: Have you ever thought of doing a live album? The press that comes over here gives the idea that every single gig is an actual performance, not just playing the records on stage, and that everything is sort of ad lib; the lyrics have changed, and the emphasis is changed.

VM: It's different every time. We're doing a live album right now, and we're going to finish it here, at the Rainbow.

ZZ: Have you ever had any problem with bootlegs, because we've never seen any over here?

JP: I don't think the bootleggers have much of a chance . . .

ZZ: Can you tell us about your appearances on other people's records?

VM: I did a couple of sessions with John Lee Hooker for Bluesway.

ZZ: Can you talk a bit about 'Cahoots'? [An album by the Band which contains a track called '4% Pantomime' on which Van sings.]

VM: We just wrote the song the day before. They were doing a session, and we were jamming for about four or five hours. Then we cut that, and that's what happened.

ZZ: Who wrote what?

VM: I wrote most of the lyrics and part of the music, and Robbie wrote some of the lyrics and the rest of the music.

ZZ: How did you come to meet him?

VM: I just met him in LA, when they were doing an album there. They had a house and a studio.

ZZ: Can you tell us what's happening in San Francisco musically at the moment?

VM: Musically not really much. East Bay Grease, that's what happening—Tower of Power. I think they're pretty good.

ZZ: You mentioned Asleep At The Wheel in the Rolling Stone piece. Are they still happening in San Francisco?

VM: I don't really know, and I haven't seen them for quite a while, because they've been on the road. I don't really concern myself with what's happening or what's not happening. If something's good I dig it, and I don't care whether they've got 25 hit records or no hit records, or whether they're playing in Madison Square Garden or Joe's Bar. I don't concern myself with that. If I dig people, I dig their music, and I listen to it, and that's it.

ZZ: Are there any songs that you've particularly begun to dislike as time has passed, that you wouldn't do if someone shouted for them?

VM: We couldn't do them if someone just shouted them out, because we're not about to just jam on them. I can't think of anything particularly, but we don't

just do them on the spot anyway.

ZZ: You have a set show?

VM: No, we don't have a set show. We change the show, but we only change the show within the context of what we're doing. We have a certain number of titles that we do, and we change them around.

ZZ: Do you have any preference as to which recording studio you use?

VM: Right now, I use my own, Caledonia one.

ZZ: Does anyone else use it?

VM: No, it's not a commercial studio.

ZZ: Presumably you know how to work a desk and all that sort of thing?

VM: A board, you mean? I know how to turn it on and off, that sort of thing, and I know what all the knobs and sliders are for, but I have an engineer who operates all the machines.

JP: He also does the sound on the road.

ZZ: There's a guy that's mentioned on the new album, and it says that he provided something un-musical in terms of assistance—Ed Fletcher.

JP: He's a spiritual adviser. He sort of keeps our heads up. He's a very up person, a positive person. He's also MC for the tour.

ZZ: Have you a preference for any particular one of your albums at this stage?

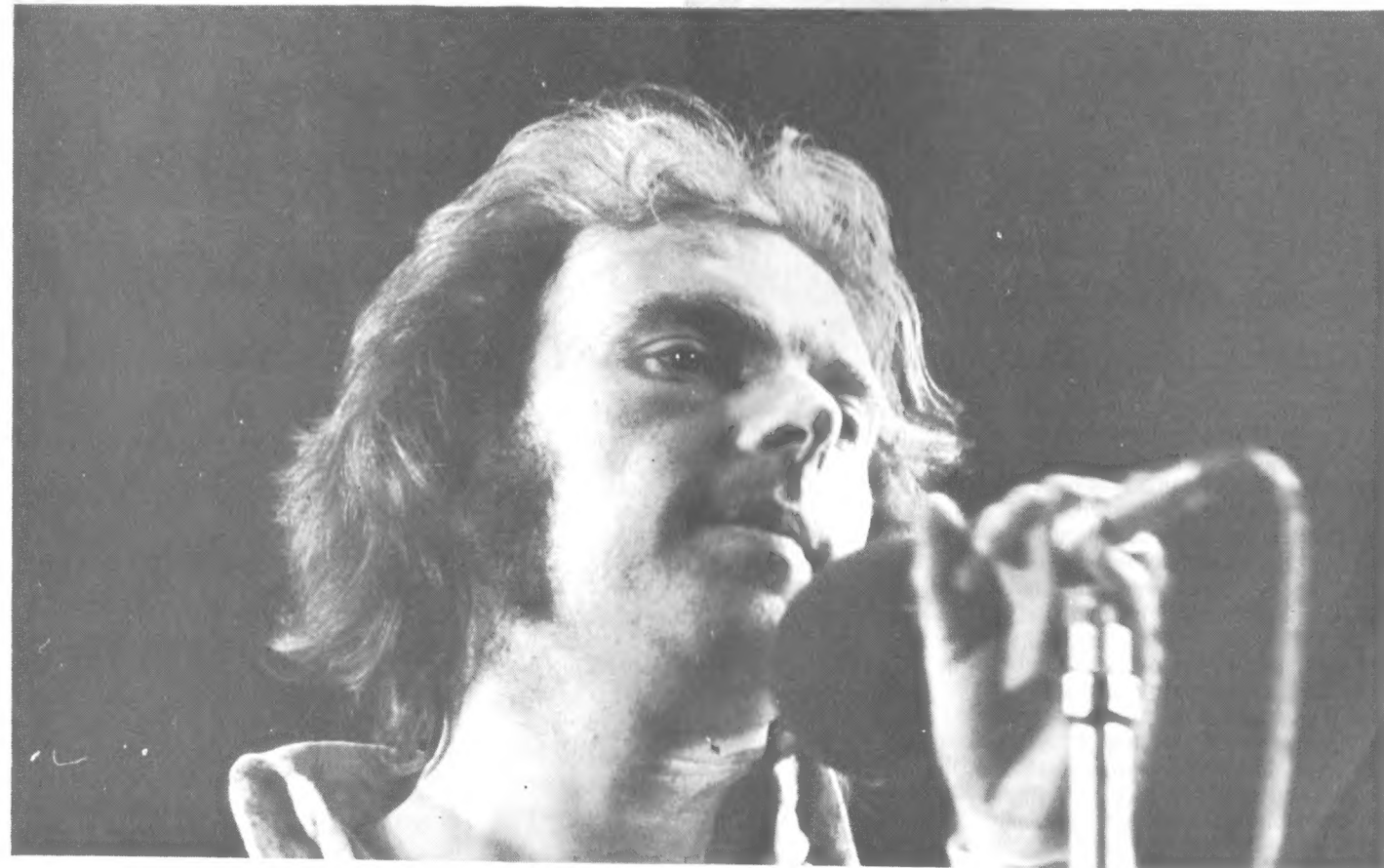
VM: No, I don't.

ZZ: Do you think each one sort of speaks for itself, and is what you want to do at that point?

VM: Yeah, I'd say that.

And I'll say goodbye, although I'm waiting for Van to come back here and perform. If he does, maybe he'll talk to us some more. Seeing or hearing this man is a positive feast of enjoyment.

John Tobler



## KOSSOFF Back Street Crawler

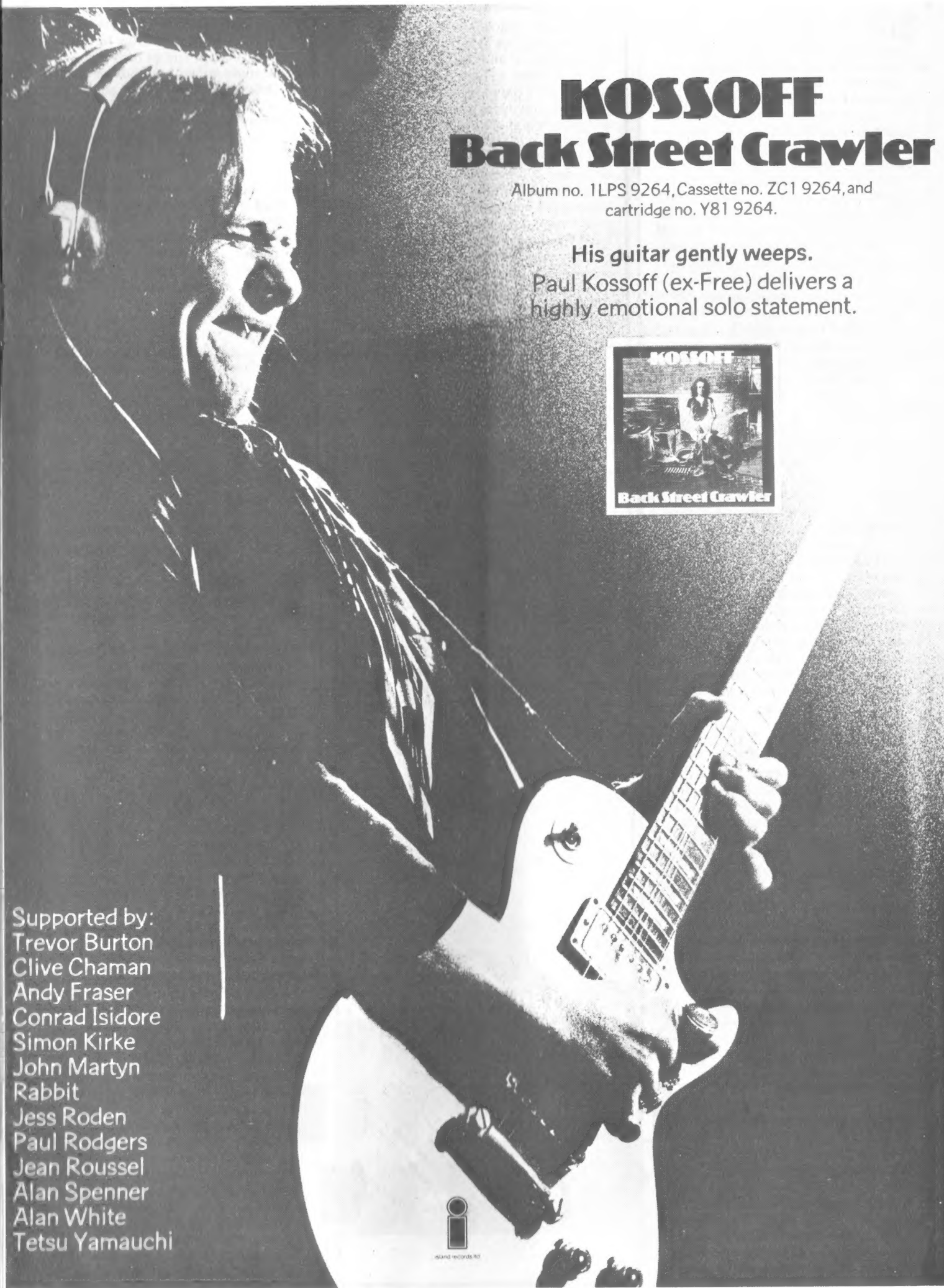
Album no. 1LPS 9264, Cassette no. ZC1 9264, and  
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Alan Spenner  
Alan White  
Tetsu Yamauchi





There wasn't much doubt at the end of last June that the Mahavishnu John McLaughlin, of all the gifted composers and performers to have tugged their bootstraps out of the morass of British modern jazz, had convincingly arrived in a new and infinitely more hospitable climate. His audience at the Rainbow Theatre threatened to take the place apart, peace or no peace, if he didn't come back for an encore—and that after two hours un-interrupted performance. The press had gone barmy, heralding a fitting replacement for the departed Hendrix. The perpetually youthful McLaughlin, short-cropped, clean-limbed, white smock and trousers making him resemble nothing so much as a trainee dentist, now plays with such invigorating force that he's almost become a superstar with no singers in his band. On their feet and stamping at 10.30 as the five musicians linked arms and bowed, requests for tunes off the last two albums rolled out from the back rows over shaking heads and unbridled bosoms down by the footlights. One guy looked for all the world as if he was working out with an invisible punch-bag. 'Birds Of Fire!' 'Meetings Of The Spirit!' Having greeted the orchestra with a respectful two minute silence requested by McLaughlin after forty minutes of hanging about, it certainly seemed as if this audience was by now firmly enmeshed in the Mahavishnu's tranquil luminescence. Then a bloke at the back bawled out 'Twist And Shout!' It was like somebody relaxing a half-Nelson. The music, dazzlingly executed, had left me feeling as if I'd been subjected to the attentions of a perfectly disciplined computer. And some strange notions kept reverberating around my head. Where had all this come from?

# THE MARCH HARE OF FRITH STREET

Somewhere in Blackheath there's a young and almost workless pianist called Howard Riley who used to hire McLaughlin for his gigs around the London clubs in the sixties. The bass player, Rick Laird, was consistently a member of one of the Ronnie Scott Club house rhythm sections, with Stan Tracey and Jack Dougan. And Tracey, a forty-six year old pianist, vibraharpist and composer, whose prickly distinctiveness has been matched only by his reluctance to present a public face any other way but on the bandstand, reaches his thirtieth year as a professional musician with a celebratory concert at the Queen Elizabeth Hall on 19th November. Of late, there hasn't been a lot to celebrate. Journalists have always lavished praise on him, and he's won and kept the respect of musicians on both sides of the Atlantic since the late fifties, but praise comes cheap. Three years ago it was only the prospect of winter mornings that kept him from slinging the business and taking up a belated new vocation as a postman. Where did all these people go wrong? It wasn't anything to do with their abilities, merely the sound they chose to make, which just didn't fit. It couldn't be taken under the wing of classical music or rock and the audiences, bewildered about what their reactions were expected to be, left it and moved on.

But Stan Tracey was a working musician long before the weather changed and jazz, while never a license to print money, was at least a tolerable life in the late fifties. The Modern Jazz Quartet and Dave Brubeck used to bulge out concert halls in those days, much to the irritation of musicians who thought the performers were jiving with whatever mixture seemed like a safe bet. The Marquee Club and the Flamingo used to present jazz most nights or the week, black polo necks and CND badges were everywhere. Pop music was mostly junk, and so obviously tied to coffee bar jukeboxes and Radio Luxembourg that it kept its place as music merely for hopping about to. Even the first Manfred Mann, which was one of the early successes when the Marquee gradually began to shift toward R & B, still owed a lot to the climate of the time. After all, it used to be muttered as a sales point, some of them are *jazz* musicians. It was a recommendation rather than a warning. Two revolutions then happened. The Beatles proved that haunting and unforgettable music could come out of the pop machine from guys without much in the way of technique. And in America, the home of all that was supposed to be fresh in jazz, the opposite was happening. It was getting more complicated every day, less and less capable of being whistled, still less danced to or even nodded at. Listened to simply as a way of passing the time, relaxing on a bed of nails would have come in first. As had happened in the forties against as strong an assault from commercialisation, the blacks had put the shutters up and this time it looked permanent.

By this time Stan Tracey was a famil-

iar figure at Ronnie Scott's as the house pianist in the challenging role of accompanist to a flood of American visitors. His career up till then had jolted along the hit and miss lines of most of the pros who'd grown up in the dance bands of the forties; their life was in 'the business' of erratic dealings with palais bands and variety shows, hollow contracts and fat agents disappearing down the fire escape with the cash. No Arts Council, no independent record labels, not many music diplomas either. Like Ronnie Scott, Tracey had done his stint with the fearsome Ted Heath Orchestra, and since entering the profession as an accordion player with ENSA during the war had taken to the road with the Gang Show, Bob Monkhouse, Cab Calloway on a British trip, and various of Scott's own bands. It was an apprenticeship that never said much about Art (c.f. Lenny Bruce's classic 'Shorty Pederstein's Interview': 'What do you think about Art?'—'I think Art blows the most, man.')

Even now, Tracey rarely mentions it. When he's playing a gig he's 'working'. All this from a man whose 1965 recording of 'Under Milk Wood' is probably the most stunning forty minutes of improvisation and indelibly original composition ever Made In England.

Because the nearest landmark to Tracey's two-fisted style is the correspondingly wayward Thelonius Monk, Tracey has frequently been passed off as an imitator. But like most apparent eccentricities, the style came naturally. Jazz piano in those days was mostly an attempt to transpose Charlie Parker's saxophone playing wholesale; frequently it resembled a typing pool on speed. 'I'd listened to Monk, sure,' Stan Tracey says of his first steps toward a trademark, 'and of all the people around at that time, I happened to agree with his approach to music, but I didn't very deliberately figure out that I was going to get this bit together just like Monk, or that bit together. I could appreciate what was involved in all the rest of bebop piano playing but it seemed so limited—once you'd got to the way of doing it you knew what was coming, there was nothing to grab you by the balls or goose you, there was very little opportunity to bring into use the things that the piano can do better than anything else!'

Getting on with playing for his living, Tracey hadn't given much thought to the problem of whether or not a white Londoner had much chance of finding himself in the family album of jazz celebrities. 'Most of the relationships between British jazz and American jazz I found out from the critics, that's where I get most of my information. They were playing jazz and we were playing jazz and that was the way it was. The first time I went to the States with a British band (I'd been several times before on the boats and copped people like Parker and Gillespie and Bud Powell in Birdland in New York) was in 1957 with Ronnie Scott, we went in exchange for Dave Brubeck. And just to make every-





thing cosy they bunged us into a rock'n'-roll show with Chuck Berry and Fats Domino and a lot of other people. The audience was ninety-nine and a half per cent spade because the show was, and we used to play two tunes at the beginning of the gig in these huge stadiums while people were still wandering about looking for their seats; so in the middle of all this these six little white faces would come on, blow a couple of choruses each and off. The audience was as astonished by it all as we were to be there. We got £25 a week but you had to pay your own hotel and find your own food. And then they had the nerve to get us to sign a form when we left stating that we'd earned the equivalent bread to the Dave Brubeck Quartet. You can imagine how likely it was that he would have been earning £25 a week in 1957.

'Ted Heath's tours were a different story because at least the bread was more realistic and they loved that band to death in America; it was all middle-class white audiences who don't know much about anything but they know what they like and they liked Ted Heath. God knows why, the music was terrible.'

But it was Heath's rhythm section that cut 'Showcase', Tracey's first album as a leader, with Ronnie Verrell and John Hawksworth. Tracey, playing in a less implacable version of his later style, performed a dozen standards from the old chestnut stall run by the likes of Jerome Kern, Richard Rodgers and Cole Porter. Though he came back to the die-hards of the entertainment business from time to time throughout the next decade, and had his own special way with standards, he clearly wasn't happy with jazz's uncomfortable sugar-daddy affair with Tin Pan Alley. Tracey won't listen to 'Showcase' now, or face the chubby innocent descending the Royal Court's steps on the sleeve, but while his playing on that record occasionally propelled itself into dead ends, the promise of it soon came good. A year later he made an album with Phil Seamen and Kenny Napper called 'Little Klunk' and Jackie Tracey, working for Decca at the time, went about setting up the outlets for her husband that he wasn't likely to hustle up under his own steam. 'It's probably safe to say,' he announces, 'that if it wasn't for Jack I probably wouldn't have made a record yet. I don't have the ability to go round and sell people an idea, especially one that they're not much keen on to start with. I remember being pleased with 'Little Klunk'. Whenever I hear what I've done played back I always think, well, that worked, and that didn't work, and I should have done that, or I wish to God I hadn't done that. The thing about recording improvised music is that the same three guys could have gone into the studio two days later and it wouldn't have had the same feeling at all.'

'Little Klunk' was Tracey's big step into space, and immediately revealed that his gifts as a composer were going to comfortably keep pace with his piano playing. 'L'il Ol' Pottsville', a veiled blues that turned out to be the



best of a memorable set of Tracey originals, came over with an invigorating shot of unvarnished conviction, as well as his unfailing knack of fishing old boots out of the river in the form of some of the most bewitchingly lopsided titles ever pinned to a tune. Already his appetite for wincing discords at critical moments had pulled the rug out from any ambitions he might have had as a commercial attraction, the melody limping uneasily about between them, as if trying to find its way home in the dark. Tracey's mannerisms at the piano seemed vividly caricatured by his sound on a record; fingers inelegantly splayed, stabbing at notes like a drunk trying to hit a doorbell, wobbling unsteadily down the keyboard to finally hunch over the bass keys as if he was bent on removing the bottom octave from the instrument altogether. The incessant stimulus of the late Phil Seamen, though recorded as if his kit was in the next room and consisted of tin trays being socked with beanbags, moves surefootedly around Tracey's contortions like a fight referee.

In March of 1960, Stan Tracey began the job that lifted the blinkers from his experience as a musician, accelerated his most creative years as a writer and a player, saw him hooked on junk and sparked off, matured and destroyed a relationship with Scottish tenorist Bobby Wellins that took their music into the world league. Another ex-Heath musician who'd been looking thoughtfully at the New York clubs was by now realising an old ambition in London, and when Ronnie Scott set up shop in Gerrard Street the long and pointless feud between the British and American Musicians' Unions had ended and the giants of the music were suddenly within arm's length. Don Byas, Zoot Sims and Al Cohn, Lucky Thompson and Dexter Gordon were among the early visitors, reflecting Scott's personal allegiances to the tenor saxophone. During the same period, the New Departures Quartet was formed in London to improvise with the poetry of Michael Horowitz and Pete Brown. Bobby Wellins was appearing with drummer Tony Crombie's band at the Flamingo Club when Tracey met him—'it was instant rapport'—and New Departures was completed by Laurie Morgan and a young bassist who had already worked with Tony Kinsey and Tubby Hayes and was soon to get his face and his playing better known with Dudley Moore—Jeff Clyne. Tracey says of Wellins: 'The thing we had together I've never experienced before or since. I couldn't wait to play. I still feel that way about playing but with Bobby there was that thing that whatever I did or whatever he did, I knew that we'd both more or less think it at the same time. He had a unique way of playing anything, and his sound was so beautiful. We had a repertoire to start from, but every night it would be a different story. It was a joy to hear how he would do it.'

After 'Klunk', recording became a fond memory again, though critic Victor Schonfield, a man with an ear for origin-

ality that's apparently immune to the prevailing wind direction, arranged for the New Departures group to record in 1961. A Transatlantic album, 'The New Departures Quartet' later emerged, with a thoroughly un-American blues by Wellins called 'McTaggart', a shuffling up-tempo contribution by Tracey called 'Afro-Charlie' that was later to find its way into the big band book, a wry medley of sentimental ballads and Wellins' superb 'Culloden Moor'—an early and tentative free-time performance. After 'Klunk' it was a slightly indecisive set, Morgan's drumming lacking Seamen's effervescence and Clyne's bass solos being spongily recorded and glued inexorably to the beat. Wellins however, appears capable of endless variations and seems at times to impel every chorus with a fresh idea, alternating force with grace, splintering barely exhaled puffs of air with mournful, swooping wails that echo more of the Highlands than Harlem. Occasionally resembling a less dandified version of Stan Getz, it was the tremble in the voice of Wellins' music that lowered a veil of wistful resignation so sharply contrasted with Tracey's pungent declamations. Between them they personified defiance and a kind of fragile pessimism that was probably unique. 'Culloden Moor' opens on a stormy landscape, Tracey's piano a deep and foreboding murmur over rumbling drums. Wellins' tenor, stating the theme, is almost statuesque. It was an achievement that was to be repeated four years later with more or less the same band, Jack Dougan having come in for Laurie Morgan. The four were to record an album of eight tunes inspired by Dylan Thomas' 'Under Milk Wood', which Tracey knew like the back of his hand. The album emerged without a slack moment, headed readers' polls, ran critics dry of superlatives and included Bobby Wellins' best recorded performance in a solemn and lustrous expansion of 'Starless and Bible Black'. But in the intervening years things were going wrong, though the evidence wasn't to be plain for a while yet. Ronnie Scott's galaxy of stars were wearing the novelty off Transatlantic visitors, rhythm and blues was elbowing the jazzmen out of the clubs or signing them up, and the shadow of hard drugs hovering over the jazz world settled on Wellins and Tracey. Tracey, in a rare bout of unhesitating lucidity, recalls the period from the seminal New Departures forward:

'When we did the New Departures album we were experimenting with a kind of free music at that time, using conventional harmony but relying on each other to catch it. The critics mostly ignored it—sometimes I think this country has never got over American food parcels during the war—because it was British and white they didn't seem to want to hear it, or if they did hear it then they must have been sickening for something that night and it was all a mirage. One way and another, Bobby has lost confidence now, and there've been times when I've thought of swallowing the business myself. We blew up "Cullo-



den Moor" for a concert at St Pancras once with the big band, and one of Bobby's greatest ambitions was to get that recorded for orchestra and strings and stuff, and I sold the idea to Dennis Preston who said we could have carte blanche, any size band we wanted, as many strings, as many anything. I phoned Bobby up, this was when he was well hung up on shit, and I say, it's all arranged, he's said he wants to do it, it's all set, all you got to do is come up here at the weekend, I'll score it out, you say how you want it and I'll do the rest. Great, beautiful, I'll be up this Saturday. Nothing, not even a phone call to say bollocks. That's happened several times since, and when you speak to him you have the feeling that when you hang up he's going to be banging on your front door with his tenor. But nothing happens.

'When he was up in town he had nowhere to stay, and he'd walk about London all night, stoned on cocaine, and his life was one long succession of kipping down on people's floors, borrowing money right, left and centre. He borrowed Harry South's car one night down at Ronnie's, he was going to Willesden to score at the all-night chemist, and Harry was a bit reluctant but eventually he said all right and I think it was four days later that Bobby turned up with the car, and when he got back he asked Harry if he could borrow ten bob—Harry, who for days had been threatening to smash his face in, put his hand in his pocket and came across with the ten bob. That was the way Bobby was. I was well screwed up myself at that time, but I still hung on to the music and to Jackie and the kids. It was pitiful, we used to meet, both out of our minds and wondering, has he got shit, has he got shit, and I said, Bobby we've got to do something about this, the music's where it's at, we've got to get straight, and he'd say, yeah, you're right, we've got to give it up. In the end we just drifted apart, he didn't show on a couple of gigs and when that starts happening you allow one for a cock-up, two for a cock-up and something else, but when it happens the third time you know it's going to be permanent. So in the end I said, well, when we both get straight, we'll do it again. But it just didn't happen that way.'

'I don't know why musicians get into it so much, there are all sorts of reasons. When I was at Ronnie's you'd have a smoke, and I was drinking at that time too, and you could get blues easily, and speed very cheaply, and it was part of the excitement of the scene at that time, because at Ronnie's Old Place then it was so beautiful to be playing with all those guys who were coming over and it went on, month after month, year after year, it was like eternal Christmas playing with those people. And then suddenly you find you're getting a bit tired keeping up with somebody like Roland Kirk at three in the morning, so you start taking a few blues and a smoke and a drink, and that feels good and then somebody tells you about cocaine and you go on



and play and you feel *great* and you come off and it's party time all the time; and the way I got on horse was one night the guy who used to sell me cocaine hadn't got any but he had got heroin and I had that and went on and played and it felt good and gave me a completely different kind of feeling about the music, a real steamroller feeling. After a bit you find yourself waking up in the morning and nodding off to kip in the middle of the afternoon so you have a snort of horse and suddenly you find you're not tired any more. And then you find out a bit later that you've got a habit. And you think, I'd better knock this off, it's getting a bit strong, and you go without and you find you've got terrible diarrhoea, goose pimples, a terrible taste in your mouth all the time, the smell of food makes you puke, and if you want to eat and be like everyone else and stay normal you've got to have some horse just to stay normal, you don't get a buzz any more. It was available and it was cheap, and I think that a lot of the guys who got ruined at that time, got there in pretty much the same way I did. That was all before the pop scene, and now the pop scene has taken over cocaine and it's become terribly expensive. Where they're going to come off better than we did is that while cocaine will put you in a mood to try anything, horse isn't as freely available as it was when I was into all that. If it was, I think you'd have a lot of junkie pop musicians.'

If junk was affecting Tracey physically—normally a robust looking man, his cheekbones were by now stretching his flesh and his eyeballs had receded into a shadowy blur—his appetite for work was apparently unlimited. In between deals with the pushers who searched him out at the club, and his occupation of the bandstand, he was scribbling snatches of melodies on scraps of paper, an idea that might have come between him and Rollins or Kirk, a way of harmonising an old tune in a new mood, plans for suites and orchestras and arrangements. On the first bus out to Streatham at four in the morning he'd rescue all the fragments, get home and work as many more hours as it took to get the suggestions of the night turned into scores and shapes. The momentum of six nights a week on the go turned him into an apparently unquenchable source of original music.

'Of course it was an incredible time for me, but not simply because I was playing with those guys, it wasn't stars in the eyes over American musicians. After the first three or four people I accompanied I soon got that bit straight in my mind. I knew then that they were just like everyone else, they were either a prick, or they were all right, you could either talk to them, play with them, be with them, and it was pleasant or it was unpleasant. People like anybody else. Lucky Thompson was very strongly anti-white, and when it came to playing he wanted a machine behind him and he didn't want you to mess with him. Guys like Lucky and Don Byas, if they played something that suggested an idea to you



and you followed it up you'd get the old elbow in the ribs through what they played, the message would come across in the music, don't fool about, you do that, I'll do this. People like Roland Kirk and Rollins and Charlie Mariano, you'd make a little statement that embellished or embroidered something they'd done, and you'd feel them taking it up, and considering it, and developing it. There were three categories, the "don't mess with me", the one who was prepared to experiment with you, and a third that was somewhere between the two. A little bit "don't mess" and a little bit "well-maybe". Pleasant.

'Of course, since I was the one guy who stayed there and there was a constant succession of drummers and bass players, I saw so many of them run about licking these guys' arses and getting nothing but contempt in return for it. So I went as far in the other direction, which puzzled a few of them who couldn't understand why I wasn't trying to get at least my head, if not all of me up their arse. I thought, I'll converse, if you'll converse, as long as we're not talking about how great you are. Some of the guys I would be with for a month and all I'd ever say would be "what are we playing?"

'So I suppose it was during that period that I learned most of what I've got together now. Playing with so many people who had their music really together, in so many varying styles and approaches, I was learning all the time. I was developing what I was into plus being able to play every night, and I now realise what a luxury *that* was. I couldn't wait to get to work and pick up where I was the night before, and all the time I was looking for new sounds, a new way of doing this and that, and stockpiling it all in my mind. I was learning about time and about how to swing and you get a bit of that from each player.'

From 'Milk Wood' in 1965 and for the next seven years, Stan Tracey at least had the ear of record producer Dennis Preston; an odd enough liaison in itself since Preston's principal output was along the wallpaper lines of Wout Steenhuis and Roger Whittaker. The deal with Preston's Landsdowne studio was that Tracey should come up with two albums a year, but after a bit the declining fortunes of jazz led to some diplomatic attempts to wean him away from all this Frankenstein music toward a world with a kinder climate. Tracey doubts that he made more than £200 out of 'Milk Wood', his most successful venture, and sales figures for any of the eleven albums probably never topped seven hundred. Eventually Preston suggested that he write a straight work for piano and string quartet, the soloist to be the American classical pianist Tom McIntosh and improvising to be firmly locked out of the studio. Tracey was worried by a music world that he knew little about, and by a fee of £100 which was supposed to encourage him to risk his neck. 'Preston explained,' recalled Tracey, 'that "we're not doing this for ourselves"—all this from a bloke who's got a record company and

a palatial home and bread that he's never going to use if he lives to be a hundred and fifty—and he's saying, "this isn't for us, it's for my son, and your son..." and I said "screw him, what about *me*?" I mean, honestly, what a load of cobblers. And they're telling me, jazz is finished, it's out, it's all over. So at that point, the composer laid down his pen.'

Despite Preston's change of heart on inspecting the sales figures, he'd made possible a peculiar mixture of recordings that took in the rest of Tracey's studio work with Wellins ('With Love From Jazz'—1968), two excellent big band albums ('Alice In Jazzland'—1966, and 'Seven Ages Of Man'—1971), a set of Ellington arrangements for the Duke's seventieth birthday in conjunction with Joe Harriott, Tony Coe, Don Rendell and Ian Carr, and his only all-round misfire on record, 'The Latin American Caper'. It's also the only session he regrets, being pretty indifferent to bongos and bead curtains in the first place. A painstaking and audacious arranger of both his own work and other people's, the orchestral records have nonetheless dated in ways that the quartet never will; you either love the sound of an Ellingtonish reed section or it sounds like the curtain on an old movie, and as the years pass it probably requires more of a working knowledge of the music's history to grasp the huge strides in orchestral writing that the Duke had managed to make. Partly because no-one wanted it, and partly because he lost interest anyway, Stan Tracey abandoned that side of his work three years ago with an album he arranged for Ben Webster ('Webster's Dictionary'). Bobby Wellins vanished to Bognor and never came back, though the Jazz Centre once mounted a benefit concert to help him get his horn out of hock, and the Parkerish alto player Pete King took his place in the quartet. By the time that 'Free n' One' was made, things were moving fast. Miles Davis was easing into rock-'n'-roll, electronics were obsessing musicians everywhere, almost everyone who could disappeared into session work. 'Free n' One' and 'Perspectives'—Tracey's last album with Preston, including Brian Spring and Dave Green but missing King—were agreeable studio jams that were breaking down the leader's long and exhaustive apprenticeship on 'playing the tunes'. Without his uncanny interpreter Wellins, Tracey's inspirations were easier to locate, and turned out to be mostly rhythmic, with his improvising style rooted in harmonic experiments, restlessly trying out successive chord voicings behind phrases that would apparently lodge in his mind, like an itch that wouldn't be scratched. King, though an imperious player with a magnificent technique, seems locked up by the perfection of his methods; in the end it signed the quartet's work up along with a lot of the other loosened bebop forms with half an ear bent toward the New Wave that was so widespread at the end of the sixties.

The record business, aware of a few vestiges of moral obligation but hoping to be relieved of an unpleasant scene by the

jazzmen getting fed up and departing of their own accord, was now trying discreetly to shift the music's foot from its doorway, or at least persuade it to change its shoes. Tracey, after a struggle to get himself free of drugs and a confused and exhausted departure from Ronnie Scott's after eight long years, was ready to take the hint. 'They said jazz was finished and I couldn't argue, because you only have to pull out my record sales and there's no more to be said. So I thought, sod this for a game, what's it all been for anyway? And I was all set to become a postman then, and it was only getting up on winter mornings that put me off. But the idea of just toddling about, with nobody bothering me and a joint in one hand and a sack of letters in the other, I thought that would be a gas. All told, at that time I was feeling totally obsolete.' It was only finding some of Wellins' sad fire in the playing of ex-Westbrook altoist Mike Osborne that kept Tracey off the streets and brought him into contact with a completely different music world, populated with the younger men for whom Coltrane and Shepp and Cecil Taylor were contemporaries and fierce inspirations. It was a long way from Ted Heath and 'Hawaiian War Chant' but, trying to recover his health in his mid-forties, Stan Tracey was forcing himself to start all over again. 'When you're playing one sort of music for a long time you don't realise that you're building up a confidence in playing that music, using past experience for the situations that occur, and when I started playing this music, I realised that I had none of that to fall back on. I went through a lot of doubt, I felt completely naked. Now that I've been playing it for a while, there's a new sort of confidence building up. Maybe I could have got into this music sooner. But there's something about being stoned so much that makes you obsessional about what you're doing at the time, you can't see anything outside it. Having got out of all that and now that I'm not working so much I've become a bit more aware of a lot of things I didn't know before, and the politics of the music industry is one. Having come to all that so late in life I find I can't handle it, it really brings me down. When it comes to jazz, a business that more or less turns you into a second-class citizen anyway, there's just so much to do.

'I don't think about survival. There wouldn't have been much point, in this business. Even the fact that I have a family never makes me think maybe I should do this or do that. I see so many people who are worried sick about money but haven't got any more of it than I have. Your mind has to be free if you're going to do anything with it. Worrying about security just holds you back and drags you down. You can't think for it. If you're in the Sahara and you break your leg, there's not much point in rubbing it with a pound note!'

On November 19, Stan Tracey re-collects it all in more tranquility than he could have called up a few years ago. Miles Davis is at the Rainbow that night, and Tracey doesn't expect that nowa-

days they'll be stealing audiences from each other. With two sidemen from the early days, Lennie Bush and Tony Crombie, plus part-time tenorist and surgeon Art Thermen—who'd worked all around the jazz scene and in Jack Bruce's short lived band with Chris Spedding and Dick Heckstall-Smith—Tracey opens the concert with music from 'Under Milk Wood' and the early quartet's work. After a session for the orchestra playing music from the two big band albums, he gets himself up to date with a set for solo piano, which he can still bring off more convincingly than anyone in the country, and duets from time to time with Mike Osborne. There's a final glimpse of the free music of the new quartet, Open Circle—with John Stevens and Trevor Watts from the Spontaneous Music Ensemble, and ex-Pentangle bassist Danny Thompson. That's more than anything a cut-down version of a superb band called 'Splinters' that probably performed no more than half a dozen gigs and included Ken Wheeler on trumpet, Tubby Hayes on tenor and Phil Seamen on drums as well as Stevens. The deaths of Hayes and Seamen in the last year rubbed the point about the London club life of the sixties cruelly home. Stan Tracey hopes that a new beginning is going to lead somewhere worth going to. His recording career is only of interest to the independent labels now, the big companies being run, as Evan Parker remarked, 'by the accounts department' and looking to jazz only for a new Mahavishnu. Tracey won't ever be able to give them that, but as long as he plays music, listening to it won't be in the hope of getting your mind blown apart, but like a conversation with an old friend.

John Fordham

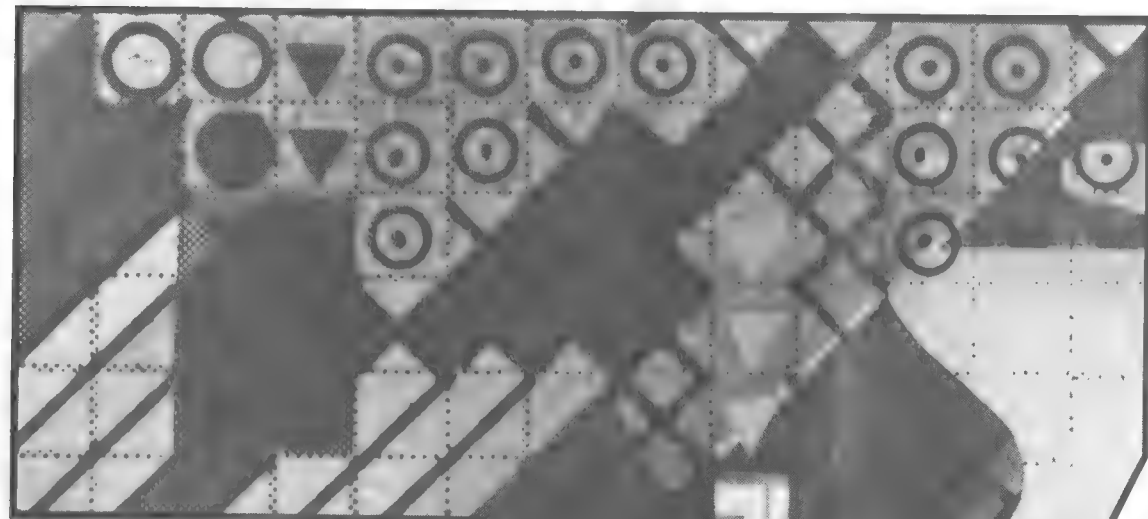
#### DISCOGRAPHY — all deletions

'Showcase' (Vogue)	1958
'Little Klunk' (Ace of Clubs)	1959
'Under Milk Wood' (EMI)	1965
'Alice In Jazzland' (EMI)	1966
'In Person' (Solo Piano, EMI)	1967
'With Love From Jazzland' (EMI)	1968
'Latin American Caper' (EMI)	1969
'We Love You Madly' (Philips)	1969
'Free n' One' (EMI)	1970
'Seven Ages Of Man' (EMI)	1971
'Perspectives' (EMI)	1972

An independently released album by Tracey and Osborne is due for release in November.



# SOFT MACHINE

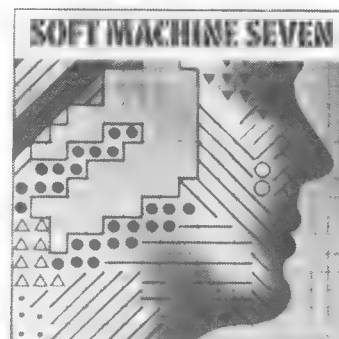


- 'Soft Machine 6' Voted top British album in Melodymaker 1973 jazz poll
- John Marshall top British drummer
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Right, now you've got a sensational headline, now bloody read the words. No, much more important, get off your arses and buy the record, because it's only £2.37 for a double album, and what's more it's a bloody sight better than 98% of all the records that have been released this decade, and it runs a lot of the odd 2% a bit close. Who? Who? Kevin Coyne, of course, I'm extremely happy to note, both for Kevin's sake, and also out of purely selfish motives, that the advertising that Virgin Records have assembled to attempt vast sales of Kev's latest masterpiece have practically all quoted ZigZag. Of course, that's very fair, as we're just about the only paper anywhere that ever mentioned Kevin, and if you get sufficiently interested to buy the album, and want to know more of Kev, there's a very long piece in Number 21, to get which, you should see the back numbers page elsewhere. This piece is more of an informational update relating to what's happened to Kevin in the last few months, since the sad demise of Dandelion, and the occasion is documented in conversational form below.

ZZ: Let's hear what happened from the end of Dandelion to now.  
KC: Well I signed for Virgin in I think it was about April of this year—  
ZZ: How long a gap was that?  
KC: Not too long really because they were fairly straight on to it, you know, in terms of wanting to sign me. There were indications from other quarters that they'd like to sign me as well, but I mean it was obvious to me anyway right from the beginning that Virgin was the right company, but I was a bit needing money at the time, and wanting money in the hand, so it wasn't so easy to agree to sign straight away.  
ZZ: Who else was interested in fact?  
KC: There was CBS, according to Clive Selwood anyway, who is a friend of mine from that company, and Bradleys, this Pye company, but that was about it at that time.  
ZZ: So you signed with Virgin and what did they want you to do? Straight away make an album or what?  
KC: I think there were quite mixed feelings about what I should do and what I wanted to do. They had all listened to 'Case History' which is not just an album—

it's a whole period of my life I'm very glad was recorded on record but is at the same time not very easy to listen to for many people. I think they just wanted to tie the words in with something strong and melodic so I think they originally indicated that I should write with somebody else, and my first view of the Manor was listening to some of Mike Oldfield's tapes and trying to work out a connection there, but he's a very different person to me.

ZZ: So they sort of said 'There's the Manor, help yourself,' is that right?  
KC: Well not quite like that, they would probably disagree with that if they read it. I think the feeling was 'Give it a go and the freedom of the Manor is yours,' so I initially went down with Dave Clague (ex Siren) and tried a few things out. We did some demos, we just worked out some songs, and it all started from there. The feeling was there, though, definitely. It's a good place to record. We were there for about two days and we did eleven tracks, just guitar and second guitar, two guitars together, no bass at all because we didn't have time for that, then we took it from there. I hadn't actually signed with Virgin at that time, but from there it led to the album and everything else.  
ZZ: Who did the organising of who played on the album?

KC: A bloke called Simon Draper, who I think is a very good lad. Obviously he knows a lot about personnel, and has a good feeling for what people need, and he's a sort of A & R man at Virgin as well as doing all kinds of other jobs as well.

ZZ: The album was produced by Steve Verocca—I mean how did he get involved because he's not a typical person, being an American...

KC: As far as I know, he heard the demos and liked them very much and wanted to do something with them and turn them into something. Simon rang me up and said 'Do you mind if he comes in and does a bit of producing?' I said no, because at that time, I'd just been listening to 'Juke Box Mama' by Link Wray and Steve wrote 'Juke Box Mama' and I think it's all right. I was a bit taken aback really about this man from Arizona wanting to produce a record of mine. I can't really see the connection, but it's there anyway.

ZZ: What about the backing musicians?

KC: They were mainly through Simon, again, Simon Draper, who obviously is involved and cared about a lot of things in music. He managed to organise Chilli Charles on drums, who's a mate of Fuzzy Samuels and they came over to England together. I think they live somewhere in Oxfordshire. Then there's Tony Cousins on bass, who's working with Doris Henderson.

ZZ: Is Doris Henderson with Virgin?

KC: No, she's not, though there was a thing where she was considered to do some kind of backing vocals on 'Marjorie Razor Blade', but it didn't happen. Jean Roussel, all the way from Mauritius, and Cat Stevens—a very large man, and

## FROM A CRUSHED DANDELION TO A RAMPANT VIRGIN — K. COYNE ESQ





a very talented feller and someone who can stitch a tune together really well.

ZZ: Did he do the arrangements?

KC: No, he didn't really. He stitched it together—he played the keyboard things and made them work. He didn't just play piano, he played mellotron and Fender Rhodes, and various electronic keyboard devices, and could play them all. Obviously a very good man to have in the studio. And I must mention Gordon Smith, who I was completely knocked out with—an acoustic guitar player.

ZZ: A couple of these people work in Virgin's shop, don't they?

KC: Well, Tony Cousin is sort of an assistant to Simon Draper in the record company offices. He knows a considerable amount about records generally, but Gordon just serves behind the counter, at the Notting Hill Gate shop, two hours every night and all day Saturday.

ZZ: You had Dave Clague on a couple of tracks?

KC: Yeh, well they were on the demo things that sort of lived over to the album. Some of them were bad, but some of them were quite good, and have got a lot of strength in them. His presence is not felt throughout but he's there anyway.

ZZ: The next thing is the way that you're going to promote the album—what's in store?

KC: Well the promotion is pretty good really, because Virgin have got an agency who are getting me gigs. Although there's projected gigs with people like Roxy Music and Steeleye Span, I'm not very definite about any of those.

ZZ: You're going out with just Gordon Smith at the moment?

KC: With Gordon, yeh, and a band for special occasions. It's all very tentative. I mean, if it was left down to me, I would go out with just me and Gordon, but of course a drummer is a useful thing to have, and bass players are useful too, but I know how difficult it is to organise things—to make it really work, you've got to really work together, and I'm a bit wary about that really.

ZZ: Of course Siren was never the most together of bands—

KC: Speaking to you across this plaid table, this table with the hole in the middle, you know they weren't, but they were a great band, and I've since come to realise that myself. I never was very sure about it at the time, but I still listen to the albums now myself.

ZZ: What's happening in the States?

KC: I've been told that Atlantic have a deal with Virgin.

ZZ: Is there any clause in the contract about not tampering in any way with albums?

KC: I'm not very sure about that, the details are—well, maybe this is difficult to understand, that when you've been around a long time and then suddenly somebody comes along and they offer you every kind of inducement to do things, and they recognise in my mind quite rightly, what is yours and what was always yours, nevertheless, so as to tampering

with albums I'm not very sure. I don't know what they'll do, and I don't think I really care at the moment other than that I'm still playing.

ZZ: Virgin are basically managing you . . .

KC: Yeh, they're coping very well in all directions with what I do. I haven't signed a management contract, but they're getting me gigs, they're working well.

ZZ: Now the record. Tell us about that.

KC: Well, that's something that you've got to really hear. It's in no way a concept thing, but it's full of all kinds of surprises. 'Marlene', the single, is just part of it really. I suppose that is the most commercial element of the album, but

there's bits and pieces of everything really, there's a song called 'This Is Spain' which is a comment on Spain in general, weather in Spain and the British holidaymaker. There's a thing called 'Karate King' which is about the bully of every council estate, and there's many more like that. There's 'Chicken Wing' which is one of my favourites because it's got all the qualities of 'The Stride', although it goes on for about six and a half minutes or something. I mean 'The Stride' to me is the classic laid back short single really, but 'Chicken Wing' is the natural successor.

There's a Catholic commentary and the Church of Ireland and all that sort of thing, a thing called 'Dog Latin' which is all about the Pope and Rome.

ZZ: What vintage is the material?

KC: Well it's all pretty much around today, around the year. 'Marlene' is about two years old, but I don't think we should dwell on 'Marlene' too much, although I think it's very commercial. I don't think there is any point in dwelling on something, but we never put out a duff single. I would say, You know, 'The Stride', 'Strange Locomotion' and even 'Cheat Me' have all been very solid. You hope someday someone will get up and dance to them. The new album is just an immense mixture of everything.

ZZ: What's your reaction to the fact that 'Marlene' is getting played like fury on Radio 1?

KC: Well I like that but I attribute that to Virgin, and their considerable efforts on my behalf and then need to sell records, which I think is what it's all about. Well, I don't think that's what it's all about, but I have to face the fact that I should be drifting in sawn off trousers and baseball boots for evermore unless I make a decent living.

ZZ: Are you after a real suit?

KC: Well not really. I'm after several suits. I'm after making a living out of it. I don't mind it people like it then that's all right, but I'm bugged if I'm going to play it every day. I got bored with it all a long time ago. There's many more like that.

ZZ: How long are you signed to Virgin?

KC: For three years.

ZZ: One year renewable contracts?

KC: I'm not very sure about that, you'll have to ask them.

ZZ: You're a bum. You should bloody well know—they might be ripping you off with point one percent royalties or

something.

KC: I know they're not ripping me off royalties wise because I looked well into that, but it is a difficult thing to sort out, and I'm not very sure about it. Clive Selwood would probably tell you about that.

ZZ: And you're spending your leisure time singing in the odd pub?

KC: Yeh, in the odd bar and generally enjoying myself. But enjoyment isn't part of the album, it still is painful to listen to in many parts, as the other one was. And not necessarily about the nice things in life. That's why I don't drift into the Speakeasy too easily.

ZZ: How do you rate your albums against each other? I mean obviously you're going to say that the best one is the new one, which is very reasonable, but how do you rate the others?

KC: I love them all actually. I really mean that. I can see very strong indications of where I was at that time and yet I can listen to things I did a long time ago. I can listen to 'The Stride' and I can listen to 'Mandy Lee' which is another track that's been grossly under-rated—it sold minus two copies actually. So I'm told. I can listen to 'I'm All Acheing' and all those things, and I can't really say that I like one better than another in that they're all different. I think it's when they start to sound all the same or they're very near to each other you've got to say I've gone somewhere. The danger is that the next one might be that way.

ZZ: Do you ever regret that 'Rabbits' was never put out?

KC: Well it's a very strange album if you ever listen to it. You heard it once didn't you? There are some very odd things on that. Things like 'Trouble In Mind' and 'Whole Lotta Shakin'. It was a Siren album—that was a Dave Clague compilation which never quite reached the airways. And I'm glad really.

ZZ: Well what do you think is going to happen? I mean, suppose that you become a big superstar, selling records like it's going out of style? What's going to happen to all these old tracks?

KC: I suppose they will all be re-released and maybe that would be a good thing.

ZZ: We won't see you on the front pages of the 'Melody Maker' saying 'These tracks were recorded when I was half pissed . . . ?'

KC: There's no chance of that, because you can't knock them really. Some of them are better than others, but they're all there for everyone to dig them—enjoyable experiences. I don't knock them, I love them all and I don't want to sound too blasé about them. It causes considerable pain to hear bum notes and to hear me singing—and you know I have always had this thing that my voice was never recorded properly, but then I've felt lately that maybe it was best that it was recorded as it was.

ZZ: With your great love of black artists, has it ever occurred to you to do an album of that sort of music?

KC: Oh yeh, well that's got to come,

hasn't it? The next one is going to be a choral work definitely. I mean in all seriousness, I want to overdub voices and do things like that. I'd love to do an album like that but I think that's such an indulgence. We could get into 'Duke Of Earl' and 'Baby Oh Baby' and 'Twistin' the Night Away' done properly. I have very distinct opinions about this sort of thing.

ZZ: What about your other activities in the things you were doing with Ian Breakwell?

KC: Yeh, well we did some things at the ICA last February or March. A theatrical thing which was a sort of pastiche of life in a mental hospital. It worked very well on and off, but it was a very hit and miss kind of thing. There was quite a bit of music in it, and words.

ZZ: Are you doing more of that?

KC: Well I did a bit after that, a minor tour.

ZZ: What, working men's clubs, and that sort of thing?

KC: No, no, colleges and universities—it's not really working men's club material.

ZZ: Do you have any ambitions to do this, or are you concentrating a hundred per cent on the music at this point?

KC: I'm concentrating on whatever works. In all seriousness, if it works well, OK, and if it doesn't, you leave it alone. I'm still painting and writing poetry—that's all in the music. The album is full of all that. Not consciously poems, but things that work anyway.

ZZ: Your favourite three tracks from the new album . . . ?

KC: My favourite is a thing called 'House On The Hill' which has a lot of dobro sort of style steel playing from Gordon. This is a track that really moves me to tears. 'Old Soldier' is another one I like which is a very similar thing with similar chord sequences, Jean Roussel playing mellotron like a six man string section. But I go for the more maudlin things. I like one called 'I Want My Crown' which is a Big Joe Williams traditional thing. I think the album is an entity as a whole, and that's why if you lift a piece out, it sounds so sort of unpressed. That's why I say 'Marlene' should be heard following on from 'Marjorie RazorBlade', which is a takeoff of an old Music Hall pub singer singing, and then into 'Marlene'. It works beautifully you know, and I keep wanting to hear 'Marjorie RazorBlade' before, but it would never get any plays.

ZZ: You said that you re-recorded something on the album from one of the previous ones . . .

KC: 'Cheat Me', which is a twelve bar boogie. It was a single on Dandelion, but it was never released on any album, nor was 'Flowering Cherry' which deserves some mention, if only for that beautiful takeoff of that Jim McGuinn twelve string which would appeal to all ZigZag freaks. I think, I love to listen to it—it's the nicest guitar solo I have ever had behind me, I think. That was John Chichester.

ZZ: Whatever happened to him?

KC: I don't know, he rang me about a

year ago talking about a band he was in. He'll emerge somewhere.

ZZ: I suppose we ought to get to what the other ex-Siren people are at. Dave Clague, playing in a pub. Tat Meager's living in Brighton playing in pubs. Mick Grattan—don't know.

KC: Well, he only appeared spasmodically on 'Strange Locomotion'. Nick Cudworth is a postman. He's still very good, although he's faded a bit in my estimation, and the last time I saw him he was playing as well as ever, and with as much power as ever. I heard this chap in the pub this dinner time playing twelve bar boogie, but I wish Nick had been there because he's such a fine player. He's got to emerge, anyway.

ZZ: Do you have any plans to take him on with you?

KC: Well I do really, but he's working full-time. If you take him away, he's lost his living. He was committed as I am, but he's playing a little more safe than I am.

ZZ: You have now totally given up the job in Camden Town at the Mental Health place?

KC: Yeh, all gone. Left it all behind. I received some severe punishment there in terms of brain and physical damage, and I couldn't take too much more of it anyway. I shall probably return to it when I have had a good rest.

*A few extra amplifying points about the record, taken from my listening to same. Firstly, I'm generally in agreement with what Kevin said, although it's fair to say that he's pretty much aware of my taste, and that may have coloured his judgements. I'd say additionally that he failed to mention some good ones as well, and by my reckoning, the fourth side is the best that Kevin has so far put together in terms of variety, a reasonable amount of accessibility, and consistently good ideas translated into songs. The follow up single to 'Marlene' is on this side, I think, and it's 'Charman's Ball', which deals with the hypocrisy behind high position, and is lyrically strangely similar to the work of that other ex-Dandelion lad, Clifford T. Ward, although it would be wrong to give the impression that they're heading in a similar direction inspirationally. Of the others, Kevin mentioned 'Dog Latin', 'This Is Spain' and 'Chicken Wing', and I'm quite in agreement with what he said. My only question mark is in the area of lyrics, which, when they are totally perceptible, are very interesting. When you can't hear them, there's a sense of loss, and I reckon that we should have the lyrics. Again without making comparisons, the latest Zappa album would be of little interest to me if I didn't have the lyrics to follow, but with them, it's very good. So what about it, Virgin? The comments particularly apply to 'Dog Latin', but with several of the tracks, it would have been nice.*

*The rockers, which include, apart from 'Chicken Wing' and 'Cheat Me', 'Eastbourne Ladies' and 'Marlene', are of the*

*usual high rhythmic standard, and I can bear witness to the fact that people indeed do dance to 'The Stride' if you put it on, and they also ask afterwards who it was. The same will happen with 'Chicken Wing', there's no doubt. The introverted songs, like 'Talking To No-One', 'Jackie And Edna' and 'Old Soldier', are up to the high standard that Kev has always set himself with such songs, and although you need to listen carefully, a good deal of helpful philosophy for those feeling less than average can be gleaned, which is where the lyric sheet might have helped again.*

*Before I finish this, a few notes to clarify the interview. 'Rabbits' was to have been the third album of Siren on Dandelion, but the group drifted apart, and 'Case History', Kevin's solo album before this one, was put out instead. Other titles mentioned are from previous albums involving Kevin, where you don't recognise them as being standards, or from the 'Marjorie RazorBlade' album.*

*Finally, I've forgotten to mention a couple of tracks where Kevin's voice takes on a totally maniacal tinge, as if he's singing from within a strait-jacket. Maybe they're an acquired taste, but I love them, and I think you should know that they're not typical, if they're the songs you hear first. One is the title track, 'Marjorie RazorBlade' herself, and the other is 'Karate King', which I think is really a great one. Altogether, I have great hopes that this will be the album which launches Kevin into the stratosphere, and I think he has a similar impression. My sincere and very grateful thanks are due to Virgin Records for having the courage and far-sightedness to sign Kevin—you can be sure that ZigZag is right behind you all the way.*

*Let's leave with a few of Kevin's words which may give a bit more insight into him:*

*'Everybody says I'll be flying high one day, but it's not easy to change when you've always seen the world in colours of black and grey.'* (From 'Everybody Says')

*Then again, maybe they don't give any insight at all, but I like him, so I don't care. You can join at your local diskery, by asking for Virgin Records VD 2501.*

John Tobler



# THE GRATEFUL DEAD WORKINGMAN'S DEAD

1970 was a busy year for the Dead. To begin with, in February they were busted en masse (bar Tom Constanten and Pigpen, but including our old friend Owsley) down in New Orleans at the same hotel where the Jefferson Airplane were busted two weeks previously. Then Tom left the band to supposedly devote more time to his interest in Scientology, and around about then came the particularly distasteful episode in the Dead's history when they were eventually forced to file a charge of embezzlement against their manager Lenny Hart after they'd found out that he'd ripped them off for at least \$70,000. Apparently, as Rock Scully tells it: 'Lenny had come to us as a man of God. He said "You've been fucked around. Now, I don't ask you to believe in Jesus, but believe in me."' (Rolling Stone) In fact Lenny had mysteriously disappeared in March 1970 and wasn't located until the following year when private detectives tracked him down in San Diego where he was baptising Jesus freaks under the name of The Reverend Lenny B Hart, the same name that he'd used when he first joined the Dead. By then he had opened eleven separate bank accounts throughout California and had left the band in a near-disastrous financial situ-

ation, one that didn't clear up until the end of 1971 following the success that accompanied their next two very well received albums. The fact that his own father had seen fit to deceive him and his friends obviously upset Mickey who decided to leave the band shortly after, but not before he accompanied them on their first, albeit very short visit to this country. (Tom Constanten also came over with the band but didn't perform.) The month of May saw the Grateful Dead play an historic set at the Hollywood Festival held at Finney Green near Newcastle-Under-Lyme, and the British press were unanimous in their appraisal of the band's performance. Good old Mac Garry (in ZigZag 13) said that they were 'totally magnificent', and Dick Lawson in Friends No.8 went completely bonkers over it all describing their set as 'the most ecstatic exploratory music ever witnessed in England'. Even the pop weeklies, most of whom had previously dismissed the Dead as an over-rated hype, had to admit that here was a band who literally commanded respect simply through their style, their approach and the nature of their music. What they gave in return on that day at Hollywood

was three hours of non-stop quality rock music that apparently left a large proportion of the audience in a state of speechless wonder. After countless rumours of impending visits (notably a projected free 'West Coast' concert in Hyde Park), they'd finally made it, and for the lucky people who saw them the myth became reality. I'm quite sure though that on that occasion they frustrated many more people than they satisfied mainly because they went straight back to America without playing any other dates, but also because the general consensus of opinion within the band was that they didn't feel they'd played well at all! How difficult it must be for those present at Hollywood to imagine them playing any better is a thought that I don't care to burden my brain with.

At that time, the Dead's fifth album 'Workingman's Dead' (WS 1869) was available on import but wasn't released here until July. When I finally laid my trembling hands on a copy, contained incidentally, in one of the most beautiful and distinctive sleeves you'll ever see... one that matches the music perfectly, I could hardly believe my ears. The Dead had finally made a near-enough perfect studio album. All eight tracks are under

six minutes in length and they're all excellent, mature country-flavoured songs, concisely arranged and meticulously performed. They managed to condense every unique element of their style into the songs, revealing themselves to be immensely disciplined musicians where before they appeared to be somewhat temperamental and unable to perform at their very best when working with tight arrangements. Their vocals had improved beyond all recognition as well, the result of hanging out with David Crosby, Steve Stills, and Graham Nash who were working with complex harmonies at the time. Also, it seemed that for once Warner Brothers were satisfied. For them the album had definite commercial potential and they took one track off it, 'Uncle John's Band', butchered it about until it was approximately three minutes long, and then released it as a single. For a song that Garcia describes as 'a major effort as a musical piece' that shows how insensitive record companies can be, but fortunately the song retains most, if not all, of its magic. It's a marvellous, joyful composition with lushly-strummed acoustic guitars, flawless harmonies and in particular the beautiful lyrics of Robert Hunter who, it must be noted, contributed all the words on the album, Lesh and Garcia being responsible for the music. On hearing 'Workingman's Dead' the most immediate reaction from anyone with even just a passing knowledge of their previous work would be one of great surprise in as much that they would appear to have altered their style quite drastically. Not an unreasonable assumption either, but in fact it just wasn't so. Garcia: 'We were into a much more relaxed thing about that time. And

we were also out of our pretentious thing. We weren't feeling so much like an experimental music group, but were feeling more like a good old band.' (Rolling Stone) Seen in its proper context, 'Workingman's Dead' is just one part of the Dead's vast repertoire of styles and musical forms. It wasn't meant to represent any new trend but is what Garcia calls 'one of the possibilities'. I think it helps to realise that the band consider themselves to be unclassifiable and without limitations in so far that they're not a blues band, or a country band, or an experimental band, or even a rock'n'roll band, but 'a group of musicians with lots of possibilities'. In 'live' performance they'll assume all of these styles and many more besides, so the fact that they might start off with 'Me And My Uncle', flow straight into 'Dark Star', and then come down to finish off with 'Johnny B. Goode', should really come as no surprise. Those of you who saw them on their last visit here will know exactly what I mean.

To dwell on 'Workingman's Dead' a little longer, it was in more than one sense a very important album for the band. For a start, the circumstances in which it was recorded served to bind them closer together than perhaps they'd ever been before. Early in the year they rehearsed all the songs for a month before going into the studio, but by the time they were ready to record they had much more on their minds than just the album. There was the bust in New Orleans and the threat of a jail sentence plus all the hassles involving Lenny Hart to contend with, but it all seemed to somehow make them more determined, gave them something to believe in if you like, and consequently the record turned out to be 'extremely positive' - totally opposite to

everything else happening at the time. And as a side-note, emphasising the all-round simplicity of the album compared to their previous releases, it is interesting to learn that it was recorded in just nine days. Then there was the critical success and wider recognition that followed hand in hand. Every review of 'Workingman's Dead' read more like a publicity hand-out than an objective judgement, but that is the effect it has on you. 'A brilliant finely-edged jewel, made with the warmth and energy of people playing to their family,' wrote Dick Lawson in Friends, and Michael Lydon who has come closer than anyone else to communicating on paper what the Dead are all about, describes it as being 'just about as good a record as a record can be'. Coupled with this, the album received an inordinate amount of air-play on the radio in America, and people who had never even heard of them before were writing in to AM stations asking to hear tracks like the brilliantly witty 'Casey Jones' where we are warned of the more bizarre perils involved in coke-sniffing, and really memorable songs like 'Cumberland Blues' and 'New Speedway Boogie'. Furthermore the band undertook several American tours with their offshoot band, The New Riders Of The Purple Sage, and each concert was billed as 'An Evening With The Grateful Dead'. The Dead would come on first and play an acoustic set for about an hour, and then the New Riders took the stage consisting at that time of Garcia on pedal steel, Mickey Hart on drums, lead guitarist David Nelson, John 'Marmaduke' Dawson on acoustic guitar and lead vocals, and Dave Torbert on bass. To end off the show the Dead would come back and play an electric set that





was designed to round things up on a suitably high note. The concerts were a great success, least of all for the fact that they attracted a whole new audience who had previously found them too complex and wayward a proposition.

Another event in that overcrowded year which is worth noting is the communal train ride across Canada that involved 140 musicians and friends including Delaney & Bonnie, Buddy Guy's Band, Ian & Sylvia and The Great Speckled Bird, Eric Anderson, Tom Rush, James & The Good Brothers (who Bob Weir has taken under his wing and intends to record), Rick Danko of The Band, The New Riders Of The Purple Sage, and of course the Dead. Only three gigs were played altogether, but by all reports a merry time was had by all with lots of booze consumed, old friendships renewed, and new alliances forged.

By November 1970 their sixth album 'American Beauty' (WS 1893) was released in the States, the last to feature the percussion work of Mickey Hart who finally left the band early in 1971 to pursue his own solo projects, the results of which will be discussed next month. But what about 'American Beauty'? Any record that continues in the same vein as 'Workingman's Dead' has got to be something special, but this one, if anything, is even more refined . . . a perfect record that exudes warmth and friendliness from every song. It's the sort of immaculately executed LP that usually ends up sounding sterile and lifeless, but not by any stretch of the imagination could you say that about this one. It positively overflows with character and vitality, expressing both lyrically and musically a full range of emotions. 'Operator' for instance has Pigpen singing in anguish about trying to locate his woman who has gone missing down in Baton Rouge, and 'Truckin'' is a humorous autobiographical account of life on the road with a chorus which just about says it all:

'Sometimes the lights are shining on me

Other times I can barely see  
Lately it occurs to me

What a long strange trip it's been.'

'American Beauty' sold more copies than any previous Dead record and Warner Brothers finally gave them the sort of publicity and attention that they'd wanted and needed all along. Again, the album was subject to unqualified praise from the press, and their popularity continued to grow slowly but surely. Unfortunately enough the recording of 'American Beauty' was also interrupted and hampered, like its predecessor, by personal crises. In this instance, Jerry's mother and Phil's father both died while the record was being cut, but it didn't stop them laying down several gorgeous songs of which 'Ripple', 'Brokedown Palace' and 'Box Of Rain' are special favourites of mine. But as Garcia remarks: 'They're good tunes. Everyone of 'em's a gem. I modestly admit.'

(Rolling Stone)

1971 was comparatively less hectic, although the band kept up a busy work schedule. In May, they caused a spark

of interest when at a Fillmore East gig they brought the Beach Boys on stage and both bands played a 45 minute jam session that was supposed to be so good that it provoked numerous wild rumours about the possibilities of the Dead and the Beach Boys making an album together. Of course it never happened, but then again neither did the albums that they were reportedly contemplating recording with Bob Dylan, the Band, and also the Allman Brothers for that matter, and those rumours were even stronger with at least some evidence to substantiate them. We'll mention their relationship with the Allman Brothers Band in particular later on, but let's not jump the gun.

In June they crossed the Atlantic once more for another fleeting visit, this time to France, where they had been booked to play at a free festival on the Rodeo Ranch (!) at Auvers-sur-Oise just outside Paris. The whole episode is nicely documented in ZigZag 22 and the previously recommended Hank Harrison book but briefly what happened was this. After a torrential downpour of rain a couple of days before, the festival was cancelled and the Dead were toying with the idea of coming over here to play at Glastonbury Fayre as well as trying to organise something in Paris. Meanwhile they were staying at a large 16th century chateau that used to be the home of Chopin but was now fitted out with all the trappings of 20th century affluence—tennis courts, a large outdoor swimming pool, health spa, and curiously enough a very modern and expensive recording studio. As the days passed however, and it looked as though nothing could be arranged, the band became anxious to play and eventually decided to give their own completely unpublicised concert right there in the grounds of the chateau. And that's just what they did. In front of the entire population of the local village, including the mayor, and the fire brigade, and a few hundred farmers and peasants, they set up on a Monday evening beside the swimming pool and played for approximately four hours sending everybody home in the middle of the night deliriously happy. It certainly sounds the sort of evening that would make a 'Dead head' give up his entire life savings for a chance to attend, and I doubt very much whether any other band on earth could have pulled off such an event the way they did.

Back to the States straight after, and work began on the next album to be called simply 'Grateful Dead' (2WS 1935). A live double album, it was released in America in September and two months later over here, and this time the range of material they use near enough covers everything they've ever done. 'It's us, man. It's the prototype Grateful Dead. Basic unit. Each one of those tracks is a total picture, a good example of what the Grateful Dead really is, musically.' (Garcia, Rolling Stone) There are three excellent previously unrecorded group compositions, 'Playing In The Band' (Weir/Hunter), 'Bertha' and 'Wharf Rat'

(both Garcia/Hunter), the latter being one of the best songs they've ever written. There are numbers like 'Mama Tried' by Merle Haggard, 'Me And My Uncle' by John Phillips, and Kris Kristofferson/Fred Foster's 'Me And Bobby McGee'. As well as this though, there is a fair sprinkling of rock'n'roll in 'Johnny B. Goode' (Chuck Berry), and 'Not Fade Away' (N. Petty/C. Hardin), an extended and improvised version of part of the first track of 'Anthem Of The Sun', 'The Other One', taking up all of side two, and finally a blues number, 'Big Boss Man' (Smith/Dixon), and two traditional songs, 'Big Railroad Blues', and 'Goin' Down The Road Feeling Bad'. The entire set consists of recordings made at Winterland, the Manhattan Center, and the Fillmore East, and is culled from the largest aggregation of music (13 performances, 9 reels of usable songs, 60 hours' worth) the Dead has ever assembled, and it is quite obvious that a lot of care has been taken in the selection of material. To my mind the record itself stands as proof of a significant step in the band's development in that they reached the point where they are supremely capable of performing structured and tightly arranged songs on stage with a consistency and confidence that is nothing less than a revelation. Listen to 'Wharf Rat' for a good example of what I mean.

At the risk of repeating myself I'd like to quote from an American press release concerning the double album. Like me, you're bound to find some of it slightly pretentious and difficult to comprehend, but hidden amongst all the romantically philosophical brain fodder there are a few interesting points.

*'The album is a sampler of ideas long brewing but never fully realised before. First there was the opportunity to include songs which weren't on any of the six previous releases. Second, there was the magic of live-performance energy—part sermon, part carnival—bouncing back and forth between the Dead and their audiences. That mood, that movement, helped to create, for example, 'The Other One', a long percussion solo breaking into three-quarter time dissonance on bass and lead, complete with mike feedback and the sounds of a crowd getting off on pure rhythm. Third, there was the chance to produce an album with "good old songs" on it . . . music that is traditionally western, nostalgic, that turns toward the country/western genre as both tribute and challenge.*

*'Most important, 'Grateful Dead' sums up, for the musicians, an attitude toward what they are doing right now. A live recording means that the Dead have responded to the dynamics of their setting moment by moment. And thus a listener can feel he is part of that setting—on those particular nights, at those particular places. The new album has the tight chemistry of simple songs that cut through heavier rock progressions like a laser beam. It's almost impossible to mistake the Dead sound but some-*



*times the message gets confused, so—from the lips of its makers here it is: 'Grateful Dead' means straight-arrow sanity in a chaotic world.*

*'The album covers that—and more. It illustrates the craft of the Grateful Dead as musicians. It tells of all the mishaps and celebrations and loneliness of being on the road—perhaps somewhere in the music it tells of the difference between east and west.*

*'Most of all, it gives a beautifully recorded slice of one month in the life of the Grateful Dead's music, sounding as it sounded on summer evenings somewhere out there on the road, where nobody knew if it was going to be any good until they got home. And listened to it all again and knew they had a record on their hands.'*

Near the end of 1971 Pigpen was taken very ill with a serious stomach and liver complaint caused through his excessive drinking habits and was admitted to hospital. He recovered well enough to re-join the band in December for the last of three major American tours, and by

then pianist Keith Godchaux had joined the band.

Bob Weir: 'Pianist Keith Godchaux and his wife Donna on vocals are incredible additions. I don't know, they must have come straight from heaven.' (Crawdaddy) They didn't in fact, but Keith was formerly with Dave Mason's group and met Jerry and Bill at the Keystone Korner club in San Francisco where they jammed once or twice together. And like in many aspects of the Dead's career, instinct played a large part in forcing the decision. Or as Keith calls it 'a flash'. 'I wasn't thinking about playing with them before the flash. I didn't even try to figure out what the flash was, what it meant, what would become of it. I just followed it, not knowing what was going to happen. I wasn't playing with anyone else before that. Just playing cocktail lounges and clubs.' Donna, on the other hand, had done studio work all her life at Muscle Shoals and Nashville, backing up people like Presley, Joe Tex, Wilson Pickett, and a host of R'n'B bands. She seems quite happy just to sing with the Dead

when they need her . . . 'they've completely changed my life, and I really love these people.'

That tour in December was, according to the 'Dead Heads' newsletter, 'a record high for the Dead as well as for their listening audiences. With simulcast radio broadcast of their sold out performances in Minneapolis, Detroit, Chicago, Syracuse, Rochester, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Atlanta, New York, Boston, and St Louis, the Dead's music reached a listening audience that numbered in the millions.'

1972 started on a very bright note with 'Grateful Dead' being declared a gold album . . . their first. Also in January, Jerry Garcia's solo album was released and that along with all the other solo and additional projects will be covered in the last thrilling instalment next month.

But without a doubt the highlight of the year was the two month European tour in April and May that began and ended in London with visits to Denmark, Germany, France, Holland, and Luxembourg in between. I was fortunate enough to be able to see them four times, twice at Wembley Pool and twice at the Lyceum, London, and it's quite possible that I haven't been the same since. Most of the great West Coast bands to emerge during the late sixties have, over the years, received the dubious pleasures of a vast overblown reputation almost entirely created by the news media that puts them in a situation where they've got totally unrealistic expectations to live up to whenever they visit this country to play. The Doors and the Airplane were both superb on their initial appearances over here, but as their reputations spiralled, they were obviously past their peak and are now no longer the important bands they once were. The Doors are excused for obvious reasons, but the sort of rut that the Airplane are currently in saddens me greatly. The Steve Miller Band too impressed me very much when they finally made it here, and Spirit, Love, Country Joe, and even Janis Joplin all managed to justify to some degree the publicity that preceded them. The most enigmatic band of all, however, the one and only Quicksilver Messenger Service, we of course never got a chance to see, and almost definitely never will. But the Grateful Dead . . . well they had a staggering aura and mystique about them. Their brief visit to the Hollywood Festival gave us a substantial appetiser, but now it was time for the real thing, the 'acid test'. To be quite honest, I was profoundly affected by everything I heard and saw. Not only did they surpass the enormous hopes I had of them, but they proceeded to set completely new standards of excellence right there before our very eyes, and to see and feel it happening was just bloody magic. It was hard enough on that first night at Wembley coming to terms with the fact that there *they* were, less than fifty yards away, but by the time they were half way into an unforgettable version of 'Uncle John's Band' on the last night I saw them at the Lyceum, I had this



inexplicably warm, strange feeling that I'd known them all my life. Perhaps the most satisfying concert however was the previous night when I swear that very few bands could have possibly achieved in their entire careers what the Dead did in five hours. A list of the songs they played would be irrelevant, and anyway it's far too long, but every concert was structured and paced to include every conceivable musical form within their scope, and when it was all over it made me feel really good right down inside. Furthermore I was given irrevocable proof to support my theory that Phil Lesh is a genius beyond all shadow of a doubt. He was pushing out endless boulder-like notes that formed the base and cornerstone of the whole sound . . . beautiful imaginative riffs during the tightly arranged numbers, and when they stretched out, veering off the road to God knows where, it was pure counterpoint at its very best. I'll never forget one particular instance where the band had worked themselves into a piece that trained students of the game would probably describe as 'electric chamber music', and Lesh was completely and utterly in control of the whole thing, crouched next to his amp and playing his bass high up on the neck gradually stabilising all the many different melodies and rhythms flying around him, and then leading them off somewhere else completely. Phil Lesh at the height of his creativity, and that's not an experience you treat lightly. But there was so much more to marvel at and enjoy as well. Keith Godchaux for one, his piano work adding yet another intricate layer to an already rich texture of sound, and it was a nice surprise too to see Bob Weir fronting the band, taking most of the lead vocals and leaving Jerry Garcia half way in the background but with his guiding hand ever present.

Now if there are any of you out there who are not confirmed 'Dead Heads' (and may the ghost of 'St Stephen' have mercy on you), you're probably thinking that everything I've just said is a load of euphoric bullshit written under the influence of an extract from some exotic species of flora. I must admit that that's what I would probably think as well, but you've got to believe me. Everything you've read is the absolute clear-headed truth, and there's no hype or exaggeration there at all because I know they wouldn't want or need it. They're the only band to have ever provoked such a reaction in me before, and I confidently expect no other band ever will.

But back to the story. The rest of the tour was, from what can be gathered in an interview with Bob Weir in *Crawdaddy* Sept '72, quite eventful. After the Wembley concerts they did a gig in Newcastle for the 'coldest, stiffest audience I've ever played for . . . nobody seemed to be at all interested in what we were doing,' and then they hit the continent for four concerts in Germany . . . 'we played in a couple of places that the old boy—Hitler—had built. That was weird.' Dates in France followed, one of which, in Lille, was cancelled because 'some asshole punk—if I may be so blunt—in

Paris poured water in the tank of our diesel truck that was to take our equipment there. So the motor seized up and the equipment never made it,' and the band had to make a hasty retreat from a considerable gathering of irate Frenchmen . . . 'we barricaded ourselves in a backroom and climbed down this drain-pipe twenty feet to the ground and escaped through the back streets of Lille on a moonless night—kind of chuckling. It was great . . . a lot of fun.' Next it was back to England for the Bickershaw Festival—spoilt only by foul weather, and then Holland, Luxembourg, where they did a 'live' broadcast for Radio Luxembourg, Germany again, and finally back to London for four nights at the Lyceum. Every concert on the tour was recorded by Alembic Sound and the best performances were released on a triple album 'Europe '72' (3WX 2668) that came out here in December last year. Commercially it was a great success, becoming their second 'gold' album, but critically it received very mixed reviews. A lot of so-called critics both here and in the States took to playing that stupid and vicious little game that most of them seem to take great delight in from time to time, i.e. build up a band's reputation to a peak with a series of condescending reviews and articles and then proceed to mercilessly slag them whenever the opportunity arrives. Andrew Weiner in 'Cream' magazine for instance asks the soul-searching question—'Is this some kind of joke?' and then in the space of a few columns takes it upon himself to display his complete ignorance and lack of understanding of what the Dead are all about. And he wasn't the only one either. Several smart-arse Yanks, one of whom claims to fall asleep every time he goes to one of their concerts, found the whole thing insufferable. Well what a shame! All I can say is that it's their loss on all counts, and if it means they won't want review copies of all future Dead LPs then bloody good job too. They don't deserve 'em. On the other hand there were people like the guy from *Melody Maker* and many others who saw the album as the next natural step in the band's development—a live LP structured in the same way as their concerts, perfectly balanced and containing a suitable mixture of songs old and new. It truthfully represents the Grateful Dead at that time they were over here, nothing more, nothing less, and as such I treasure it. To be completely fair though, I think that anybody not totally immersed in the band and their music could probably find reasonable grounds for criticism, but nothing I read was anywhere near being constructive or even objective. Regardless though, it of course remains an essential buy for all Dead Heads. Enough said.

Which brings us up to this year and a number of interesting developments and experiments. Plans to form their own record label, tours with the Allman Brothers, and Garcia's re-emergence as a bluegrass fanatic with a new band called Old And In The Way . . . all these were signs of the band's stability and integrity, not to mention their ever-increasing

population. But unfortunately there was one piece of news that overshadowed everything else. On March 8th at about 9pm Pigpen was found dead in his apartment at Corte Madera, California. He had apparently died two days earlier from a stomach haemorrhage after being extremely ill for more than a year. He accompanied the band on the European tour against doctor's orders and on arriving home he was said to have anaemia which developed into cirrhosis, a very unpleasant disease of the liver. It all stems from his love of booze which was the cause of all his problems. 'He drank junk—Ripple and Thunderbird, even Thunderbird mixed with raspberry Kool-Aid. And even after he was making some money, the highest grade lush he ever drank was Bourbon Deluxe. He was never quite sober, even when he woke up; he'd wake up drunk.' (Rolling Stone) In his last year he played with the band very infrequently but was part-way through making his own solo album. Whether we shall ever get to hear the material he actually finished remains to be seen. But I shall always remember Pigpen for his storming rendition of 'Turn On Your Lovelight' from 'Live/Dead', and even though his musical contribution to the Dead was the least of any of the members, he was still an important part of them and I'm sure they'll miss him.

Life went on as usual however, and the band continued to play dates all over America in places that because of their drawing power had to sometimes accommodate more than 15,000 people. This seemed to contradict what they'd always felt necessary for their music which was to try and play in halls that hold no more than 5,000 people . . . preferably closer to a 3,000 capacity because of the problems with the sound that are encountered in places that are any larger. But a greater demand obviously means larger halls which in turn necessitates more equipment, bigger organisation, larger overheads and consequently more gigs to pay for everything. As an example of the sort of sized crowds that the Dead attract, earlier in the year they played three concerts at the Nassau Coliseum on Long Island (the Dead are enormously popular in New York) to a total of 60,000 people and the first two were completely sold out by word of mouth in 2½ hours!

As far as recording goes, their contract with Warner Brothers expired last January, which gave them a chance to organise something they'd thought about for a long time—their own record label with total control over all aspects of manufacture, production, and distribution. The idea finally became a practical reality last month when the Dead's first studio album since 'American Beauty' (that's not counting Bob Weir's solo 'Ace'), was released on Grateful Dead Records. But they left Warners owing them one album (on the last count), and that turned out to be yet another 'live' one, titled 'History Of The Grateful Dead, Vol.1 (Bear's Choice)' (BS 2721). But really it's unlike any other 'live'



album they've put out. 'It's a side of the group that never went on record . . . it shows a Dead you'll never see or hear again.' (Garcia, Circus) I wouldn't say, as many have, that the album is exclusively a collector's item, because it's very pleasant to listen to, and when you know a little bit more about it, it be-

comes particularly interesting. It was compiled by Owsley 'Bear' Stanley who had taped everything on a small Nagra two-track portable, wired into the PA console, and the resulting sound quality is remarkably good. Rock Scully describes the album as 'sixty percent Pigpen and forty percent acoustic material'. The

opening track, 'Katie Mae', features Pigpen singing and playing bottleneck guitar . . . 'it was the only time he ever did it'. Garcia and Weir followed with 'Dark Hollow', 'I've Been All Around This World', and 'Wake Up Little Susie' . . . both of them sitting down and playing acoustic guitars, something they just





don't do anymore. The second side of the LP is, in contrast, all electric with an 18-minute version of 'Smokestack Lightning', and 'Hard To Handle'. To bring things into perspective, it should be noted that the whole album was recorded at the Fillmore East during two Valentine's Day gigs in February 1970, which was just one month after 'Live/Dead' was released, adding validity to Garcia's statement that up until the second double album, their records didn't really represent them as a 'live' group at the time of their release. But despite what you may have read in other journals, 'History Of...' is a good album, and like I said, worth a lot more than just the curiosity value that a lot of people have labelled it with.

Concert-wise, the highlights of the year have been their appearances with the Allman Brothers Band. To begin with, both groups were booked to undertake a joint tour of the States but this had to be cancelled owing to the sad death of the Allman's bassist Berry Oakley. But they did team up again last summer at the RFK Stadium in Washington and played several other dates together as well as including the much-publicised Watkins Glen shindig where the Band also played and an estimated 600,000 people came to listen. Apparently there's going to be an album of material recorded at Watkins Glen although I understand the Dead may not be too enthusiastic about releasing such recordings as they weren't satisfied with their performance on that occasion. Future gigs and dates with the Allman Brothers, and the Band for that matter, are almost definitely on the cards though, and wouldn't it be really great to see all three bands come over here together for a tour?

So now we're just about up to date. All that remains here is to talk about the Dead's own record company and

give its first release, 'Wake Of The Flood' (GD-01), a well-earned mention. Grateful Dead Records took over a year in research, investigation, and financial problems to become a reality. But they finally achieved it, and you can be sure that it's going to set a precedent for other bands to follow. After talking with Alan Trist of the Dead's management, who was over here a few weeks back to publicise the new album and hustle Atlantic Records (distributors of the album over here), I was very impressed by the obvious care and attention to detail that would ensure that Grateful Dead Records becomes the most idealistic as well as the most realistic of record companies. For instance, 'Wake Of The Flood' was recorded, mixed, and mastered in Sausalito, Marin County, and is being pressed to weigh exactly 128 grams which is heavier than an average album and provides better reproduction. Three pressing plants are being used where quality control is supervised by a member of the studio production team, something totally unheard of in the record industry. Distribution too has been sorted out with no serious hang-ups. In the States the records are shipped to 18 independent distributors who constitute the company's primary distribution system. More about the future of Grateful Dead Records in the next issue, but now I want to tell you about 'Wake Of The Flood'. And what an album! Five beautiful Garcia/Hunter compositions, including one absolute killer of a song called 'Here Comes Sunshine', a Godchaux/Hunter song with Keith singing, 'Weather Report Suite'—a lengthy Bob Weir/Barlow/Anderson piece, and the added attraction of Doug Sahm on 12 string guitar and two ex-members of Doug's old band El Quintet, Martin Fierro (alto and tenor sax), and Frank Morin (tenor sax). There's also a rather good violinist named Vassar Clements

who like the rest of the additional instruments blends in perfectly with the music, which retains every ounce of that Grateful Dead 'feel', yet is continually expanding and becoming more sophisticated. They've come a long way since 'Workingman's Dead' and even 'American Beauty' but the essence of the music is still the same. 'Wake Of The Flood' has already established itself as one of my very favourite Dead albums, and I urge you to make sure that you at least get to hear it. Oh yes before I forget... there's a nice surprise on that impeccable Rick Griffin sleeve design. When you get the album home, hold it in front of you, turn it 45 degrees anti-clockwise, look at the cloud in the picture, and see if you can stop yourself from smiling. While you're recovering from that, put the record on and enjoy what is at the very least one of the best ten albums released so far this year.

Well, that, I think, concludes the main history. No doubt I'll think of something I missed out and will probably have to include it next month when I shall be dealing with all the off-shoot groups and albums, incidental characters, outrageous rumours, and everything and anything partially related to the Dead. One last point... the re-mixed 'Anthem Of The Sun' that I mentioned in the last issue has, I'm happy to say, been released in the States although it's not clear who actually did the re-mix. I thought it was Phil Lesh, but Chris McHugo who took all the photos spoke to Garcia at Watkins Glen and he claims to have re-mixed it. Anyway, the main thing is that your local import record shop should have copies of it very soon in the covers that were originally intended for it. Basically the design is the same, but the purple background now becomes white, and it shows up quite magnificently.

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# THE BIRTH OF COUNTRY GAZETTE

When Country Gazette were over here recently we approached Byron Berline for an interview, for fairly obvious reasons. But it appeared that the mention of the name ZigZag had other connotations for him, and our original call was returned later with a somewhat cryptic rider—'Yes Byron wants to have a word with you about the article on Herb Pedersen and The Dillards'. Now I'd seen Byron when he was over here last year and I knew he was about 6ft 2ins tall and built like a combine harvester, so I wasn't too keen to have him vent his spleen on me. So since Tobler is the largest member of the staff, and had, anyway written the offending article, we sent him along. As you can tell from the following interview, Byron was well pissed off at some of the remarks John made, and the emphasis that emerged from Herb's comments. But all's well that ends well, and you'll be glad to hear that John is still in one piece.





## BYRON BERLINE

ZZ: Well, tell me what you didn't like. I can imagine what some of the things were.

BB: Well, first of all, I think you did a great job putting together this article, you know.

ZZ: I must apologise for the layout and pictures which aren't captioned which they should have been. That's nothing to do with me unfortunately, I complained bitterly about it, I mean nobody would recognise you from the crewcut . . .

BB: Well that's no problem, I was surprised that you even put that picture in there.

ZZ: Well, finding a vintage picture of the Dillards is pretty difficult. I had some with Herb Pedersen in, but the guy who did the layout didn't use them, and the only ones that I could get with Douglas in were these two which are off the first two albums. Off the first album and 'Pickin' And Fiddlin'', rather. BB: He sure looks young there, doesn't he? Don't we all? No, I thought you did a good job of the way you put it together and everything, but I thought there were a few places where you were misled.

ZZ: Right, OK.

BB: I'd like to get that cleared up. I went over this a while ago because I knew I was going to have the interview with you, and I went over it, and I read the whole thing, and I got down to this point, 'Pickin' And Fiddlin''. OK. It's got down here, and it says 'the reasons are indistinct at this range—maybe it was an attempt to get back into favour with the folkie aristocracy . . .' or something like that. You know first of all, the reason they did this album wasn't for any reasons to impress any critics or anything like that, it was just strictly something they wanted to do. Because I met the Dillards in 1963. Well, in fact, it was the same day that President Kennedy was assassinated, November 23rd or 24th, one of those two days anyway. I had never heard of the Dillards, in fact I had never seen any good bluegrass groups at all. You know what few I'd seen were at the local university, and the Dillards came through there and I had played on the same show that they were getting ready to play on, and I played and I already had my fiddle with me, and I kinda walked out in the corridor there and they were all standing around. I started talking to them, and Doug Dillard, and I'd never heard of the Dillards, they didn't mean a thing to me. Like I'd read in the school paper that the Dillards were coming to town and there was a banjo player and I thought they were like all the rest of these banjo players around here, and stuff like that—you'd have to tell them the chords to boil the cabbage down. I mean like they were terrible. And I thought they were probably about the same thing from what I'd heard. Then I talked to them and they said, 'Well look, after we get off from our show would you come back and play with us in our dressing room when we get through.' So I said, 'OK, fine.' So they

went out and did their show, and I was just amazed and I thought 'My God, that's just amazing you know, great.' I couldn't believe it you know. So when they were through, they all dashed off to the dressing room and I ran back there. I tried to find their dressing room and I couldn't find it and I was panicking and thinking 'Where are they?' Finally I saw them coming out of a room, and they were all dressed all ready to go out and get in their car, and go back to the city—they were playing a club in Oklahoma City. So I went back down to their dressing room where they were about to come out and I said, 'You guys are leaving right?' and they said 'Yeah, we gotta get back to the club and everything,' and Doug Dillard said, 'Look, I told this guy that we'd play a couple of tunes with him, so why don't we just take time out and play a couple and then we'll go?' So I didn't know what to do because I didn't know any bluegrass at the time, just old time fiddle tunes. So I thought 'Hamilton County Breakdown' would be a good song to start off with, because it was kinda bluegrass, and they might be able to follow that better than some of these other old time tunes, so I started off with that, and Doug just fell right into it, you know. I didn't get done with the tune until all of them got out their instruments and played there for two hours. We played in that dressing room. It was just the most amazing thing that I had ever done, and we just all had a ball, and so I went back to the job with them at the Bondai [?] Club in Oklahoma City and I played on stage with them. The thing went over so well, you know, that the next time they came through Oklahoma, they asked me to cut an album with them. It was just about another month later so it was a very short time before they were back through again and they asked me to do this album. Well, I was just flabbergasted, I thought that's great. So I went out in '64, July, in fact, I think I turned 19 or 20 in the studio. I think July 5th and 6th was when we did it. It wasn't really rehearsed, it was just that we got together and we did this thing, and it wasn't for any critics. It was just they loved this kinda music and they thought they wanted to do, and I was really tickled because it got me really started in the music business. And the fact that the album is still selling better now than any other album that they ever had, almost, except the last two or so, because I've been getting royalty cheques every six months, so I know, and they're getting bigger. And now it's a classic fiddle album in the States. You probably got a misunderstanding, you may have followed albums like 'Back Porch Bluegrass' and 'Live Almost', and then up comes this obscure looking thing and thinking, 'That's not right, it doesn't even feature any of the Dillards.' It's just the fact that they wanted to do it. It wasn't that they were trying to do anything especially great for the music field, they wanted to do that.

ZZ: They were with a label that would allow them to do so.

BB: Right. It wasn't a big budget, we did the whole thing in fourteen hours, like one session was six hours and the other eight.

ZZ: Right, well the reason that I said this thing about an attempt to get back in favour with the folkie aristocracy, was this thing about the Little Sandy Review or whatever it was. There was a thing about the Dillards had put humour into bluegrass, and they weren't supposed to, because everybody was accusing them of being impure, and I wondered if this album was to sort of get back. That was the reason I said that.

BB: Even if it was, so what?

ZZ: Your lady asked me which way I heard the Dillards first and I heard 'Wheat Straw' first, and then I heard 'Copperfields', then I heard 'Live'.

BB: You didn't start with them from the beginning, that's what I thought.

ZZ: Well I don't think 'Pickin' And Fiddlin'' has ever been released here.

BB: I think it has ain't it? Well I had several guys saying to me last night, praising that 'Pickin' And Fiddlin'' album.

ZZ: You can get it from the States, but it certainly isn't in catalogue now, several of the others are.

BB: I didn't particularly care for what you said here about Eck Robertson. You evidently don't know who he is do you?

ZZ: No I don't.

BB: He was one of the first guys to record country music in the United States. 1923 he recorded a medley of songs, and he also recorded 'Sally Gooden'. He is probably one of the better fiddle players ever to be around.

ZZ: You know really I have approached bluegrass from the wrong way.

BB: It's not bluegrass at all. I mean, he is strictly an old time fiddle player and one of the greatest, and that really strikes home to me you know, when I hear a guy making a little bit off remarks about him, I really get upset.

ZZ: I'm sorry, my apologies.

BB: I just want you to know that he is very well respected in the fiddle field. A lot of people haven't heard of him, but fiddle players know of him, and they really respect him a lot. These things get out like this and a lot of people take it for granted everything they read is true. Another thing, you mention, 'The Last Of The Red Hot Burritos' and that you certainly must check it out and it's much better than 'Pickin' And Fiddlin''. I really must disagree with you there. It doesn't even compare to that you know. That 'Orange Blossom', I didn't even want released at all. It's the most terrible job that I have ever done. The reason they released it, was because of the crowd reaction. The crowd just—two or three thousand people in the auditorium and they stood up on their chairs, and they just went wild, it was overwhelming. That's why they left that on, but I didn't want to because the performance wasn't all that good. Some of the musicians there weren't familiar and the beat was getting this way and that way.

ZZ: Yeah, it always struck me as rather



a compromised group, the Burrito Brothers, that did that particular—well, it wasn't really the Burrito Brothers in essence. It was Rick Roberts with a lot of other people.

BB: Yeah, Kenny Wertz was playing the banjo of course and Chris Hillman was playing the mandolin. Then the article goes on to say that 'it certainly wouldn't hurt you to check it out because it is very good and much better than 'Pickin' And Fiddlin''. Well, there you have it, the first bummer from the Dillards.' The fact is that you may think it's a bummer which is fair, but I can tell you from fact that it is not a bummer because of the album sales. I know there is no singing, no flashy licks from Doug, or Dean or Rodney, they all do their thing, but if you listen close, Rodney has played the best guitar that he has ever played on any

album, on that album, and he'll tell you himself that is the best guitar playing he has ever played and it's on that album, right there.

ZZ: I'll obviously have to listen a little harder.

BB: You listen to his guitaring on that album. It wasn't me that made that album, it was them. Their back-up on those fiddle tunes were superb. Doug Dillard at that time was by far and still is, I think, the best banjo player behind a fiddle player that ever was. That probably doesn't mean that much to you but to a lot of other people and a lot of other bluegrass and country people it means an awful lot, because I mean you're talking about people like Earl Scruggs too, Earl Scruggs is awful good, but I think Doug is a little bit better, you know. And I think Earl Scruggs is second. Alan Munde's also good too. I kinda got upset

when I read this. You're really knocking the 'Pickin' And Fiddlin'' album. You didn't think there was anything sufficiently good to put on their album. Are you picking the songs to put on this thing? How is this working, I mean who are you working with?

ZZ: Well Elektra, I'm a big Elektra freak you see. The people who work for Elektra aren't too familiar with the Dillards, basically. In England this is.

An album is being brought out in England to coincide with the Dillards' tour. I wouldn't say the same thing in America because as you know Elektra is a very careful company who do everything properly, you know, as far as they can. The company that does everything far better than anybody else I'd say. But in England they have a much smaller staff, they don't release all the albums, they don't know so much about it.

BB: What albums have been released over here then of the Dillards? I know 'Wheatstraw Suite' and 'Copperfields' have.

ZZ: And 'Live Almost' was, and I'm not sure about the other ones because Elektra at that time was an independent company, very small.

BB: Well do you think it would be a good idea to put some of this stuff on there?

ZZ: I felt that it was an album that, if it was going to be released, needed to be released as it was, 'Pickin' And Fiddlin''.

BB: Well it might be a good introduction. I mean I'm not trying to tell you what to put on, I don't care one way or the other, but it was just the fact that you said that it wasn't sufficiently good. ZZ: I meant commercially, I imagine. BB: Well I think I shall have to disagree with you, I think there is a lot that is commercial on there. Not everything is commercial, but there are some things on the album that are.

ZZ: I felt that 'Wheatstraw' and 'Copperfields' were, if you regard the Dillards as a vocal group, and from that commercial aspect.

BB: Most of their albums are vocal, their other albums are not, you can't just say they're a vocal group, because they do a lot of instrumentals. It's just like us—you can't consider us just as a vocal group, because we do instrumentals, we love instrumentals. They were the same way back then. Herb isn't near as good a banjo player as Doug Dillard is. That's why they did a lot of instrumentals, you know, which they should because they were good and nobody else could do them any better.

ZZ: No, I felt that the vocals which were on 'Back Porch Bluegrass' . . .

BB: Oh well, that was their first attempt. If one is trying to present the Dillards as what they were, at that point they were a much stronger instrumental band than a vocal band. Still, you didn't mind the vocals, because the instrumentals were so good. I mean the vocals still sounded OK.

ZZ: Yeah, they sounded OK, but they weren't up to the standard of Herb's vocals.

BB: Of course not, no.



ZZ: Because Herb is more of a vocalist, more than a banjo player?

BB: Right, most definitely. Herb's a good banjo player, don't get me wrong, a great banjo player, but anybody to come into the Dillards' place to pick the banjo couldn't just be anybody. I mean, the fact is that Herb was such a good singer, that really made it, he had to make something. If he was just a banjo player and he sang like Doug did, phew! He wouldn't have made it, the way it was he was such a great singer, he really got them up you know, he really did well. So you know that's the difference, and I think they were as good back when they first started in different areas as they were in 'Wheatstraw' say, but you know personally I like all their albums for what they are. When 'Wheatstraw' first came out I listened to it two or three times before I made up my mind, 'cos it was so much different from what the rest of them were.

ZZ: Yes, it is very very different indeed.

BB: That 'Roots and Branches' is a lot different too.

ZZ: Well, as you saw, I wasn't amazingly keen on 'Roots and Branches', what did you feel about it?

BB: I'm not too keen on it either.

ZZ: I think that the Dillards attempting to be a heavy electric band just doesn't work and I feel that the tunes were terrible, they just didn't go anywhere, they had two verses and then it was all fade out.

BB: I thought Rodney did a right fine job of what he was trying to do there, but it doesn't completely show what the Dillards are. It's just Rodney Dillard and Richard Podolor, that's it. The rest of them didn't have anything to do with it hardly. I think they were really trying to get a big hit which I guess didn't happen. I haven't heard the next album. There's another little thing I want to clear up with you.

ZZ: About what Herb said, I can imagine, at the start of Country Gazette, it's absolutely what he said. I didn't change any of it, because this is obviously going to be a bone of contention.

BB: I will have to talk with old Herb when I get back to seeing him again.

ZZ: He may not have seen this yet.

BB: Oh well I'd like to take this copy with me. I says, 'What happened next was kinda a weird scene. Now I was one of the original members of Country Gazette. When Douglas and Byron split up, Byron asked me to join him. That was the end of Dillard and The Expedition, so it was comprised of Roger Bush, Billy Ray Latham, Byron and myself.' That is not true. What happened was when Doug Dillard split there wasn't a Country Gazette at all, there was nothing. There was still the Expedition as far as we were concerned, because he didn't know what else to call it. Billy Ray had already left to join the Dillards. So we did a couple of shows as the Expedition with Roger Bush, Billy Ray Latham, Byron and Herb that was OK. We were already booked on shows, so we had to get some guys together to do the show, 'cos

Doug Dillard had already gone off his own way. So we went ahead and did a local show or so around there, and evidently Herb thought that was the Country Gazette, which isn't true at all. When we formed Country Gazette we had Kenny Wertz, he was an original member of Country Gazette. Herb was around, working, doing this and that and the other, but he didn't want to commit himself. Like one time we said, 'Now Herb, are you going to join the group permanently?' Herb would say, 'Yeah,' and we'd say, 'OK, fine,' and we would quit looking for anyone else because we were in the process of hiring another guy, so we said, 'Herb, we want to know what you're going to do, 'cos we want to know whether you're going to join us or not.' We wanted Herb and really liked him and thought he was a good singer and banjo player. So another week we had a job out of town and Herb says, 'I can't go out of town, because I don't want to get into that scene with a group again.'

Which was fine and we said, 'OK'. So actually he never was really in the group. He never was an original member at all. He hung around a lot, and he did help us with vocals here and there. And it really kinda got me when he says 'I kinda organised the harmonies for them and got them pretty tight,' and 'through a few other people we got a record deal and at which point I said OK that's all I want to do.' It sounds as though he started the whole damn thing. You know, he just kinda wanted to get us on the road and the let us go like, which is garbage. We thought we did him a favour, and let him come in and play with us as he had nothing else to do. He was working in a filling station. He had a good time with us and that's all it was. When it came down to doing business he didn't want to do it. He thought that he wanted to do his own songs, and his wife, and all this stuff had a big influence on him, wanting him to do this and the other which is his business. It is none of my business, I don't care, but when he comes to be associated with our group, it becomes our business. So he was never what you call a fully fledged member, he was around when it first came about. But when it really came down to the nitty-gritty, we had to get Alan Munde, and he has stayed ever since.

ZZ: You got Kenny Wertz first and then...

BB: No, Kenny Wertz stayed till just last July when we picked up Roland White. We picked Kenny up when he was washing dishes at Lake Tahoe and Chris Hillman told us about him and said that he was a good singer and that he could pick a banjo or guitar or whatever. So we needed a guitar playing tenor singer, and this was great. So we picked him up and he wanted to stay and he stayed a couple of years, and then he decided that music wasn't exactly what he wanted to do, and he was a weekend picker, you know, he didn't want to go out and really work at it. You know, talk to people like you, he didn't like that at all. He just wanted to kinda play music for his own enjoyment and that

was it. So he got his own business.

ZZ: Well what is Herb doing now, have you any idea? He talked about this group with Al Perkins.

BB: Well that's what he's trying to do, he's trying to get a record deal going. He does sessions and he's doing real well, he's getting a better name as far as vocals—he's a great singer, and really arranges songs well. This group you're talking about as far as I know he is getting it together for a record company. It hasn't come about yet as far as I know. He's very talented.

ZZ: Have you used him on your second album?

BB: Yeah, we used him on 'Lonesome Blues', sounds like a real old bluegrass song, it worked out really well.

ZZ: He wrote some very nice songs on the last two Elektra Dillards' albums I think, he just seemed to put something a little bit different there.

BB: Yeah, I thought it was really good. I'm amazed with Herb, I think he's great. It's just the fact that you know...

ZZ: Yeah, I know you'll tell him all about this, well this will be printed just as it is, let there be no doubts, exactly as you've said it. The last thing I want to do is misrepresent things, but you can imagine the only thing I have to go on is infrequent visits from people to England like yourself and Herb.

BB: Well the Country Gazette as far as I know we've got—we've done on our own. I mean Herb has helped a lot, let's face it, but I don't like to see him taking all the credit. This is what it seems in this little article. If he has, I don't see how we can ever perform without him! I'm sure that when he finds out the whole gist of the thing he'll say 'Well no, I didn't mean it that way at all.'

ZZ: I'm sure that that is what will happen. I still have the tape. I kept it purposely and I'll keep this one as well. There is very little documented about the Dillards in England in reasonable articles. I mean, these little album reviews, they tell you nothing, and they are usually inaccurate.

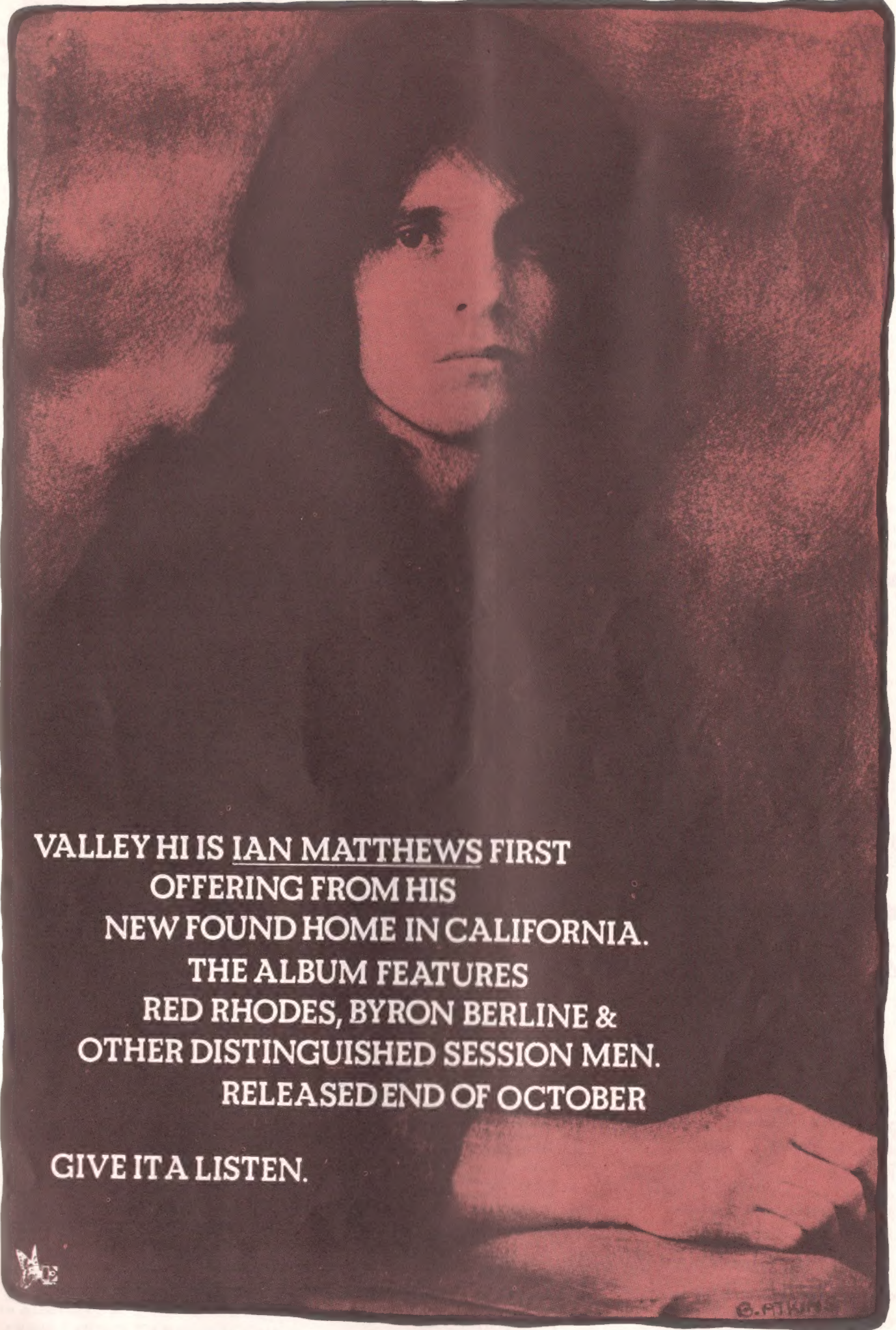
BB: That has always been my pet peeve, writers or reviewers doing things that they really don't know that much about and they think, well I think it's this way, so let's go ahead and print it anyway. It always gets back to you doesn't it!

ZZ: Well really thank you very much for wanting to put it right, many people wouldn't bother.

BB: Well you must be a nice guy, because you get a Country Gazette T-shirt.

ZZ: I shall always wear it.

John

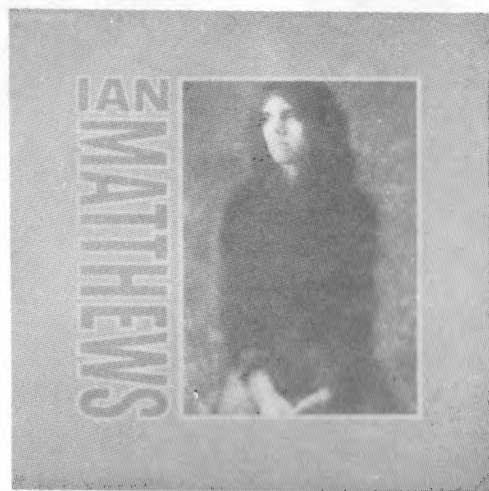


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# SPOT ON

ZigZag is the only magazine that  
would have taken the trouble to inves-  
tigate the career of a band like The  
Dillards, and as you can see from the  
interview with Byron Berline, the only  
one that would go to such lengths to tidy  
up the story from another source; and it  
was nice to receive this letter from Herb  
Pedersen congratulating us. I've re-  
produced it in full, because in a way it's  
a letter thanking you ZigZag readers for  
enabling us to carry such features.

10 October 1973  
Studio City

Dear John:

Daniel Bergoise of UA was kind  
enough to send me a copy of your  
'Dawn Of Man' article on 'The Dillards  
— J Rivers—Me'. It was in the ZigZag  
Vol. 3 No. 10. I've got to say that I  
think your entire piece was terrific. Not  
because of what you said about me, but  
rather what you understand about the  
whole situation. It was really quite good.

As of now, nothing's happening with  
my album deal, although I'm finally  
ready to do it. It's a slow process, this  
recording business, I'm not giving up  
though.

I assume you heard about Clarence  
passing away, a dreadful loss to the in-  
dustry let alone his friends. His funeral  
was quiet and well delivered. I'm sure  
he's resting fine. We'll all miss him.

Anyway, thank you again John,  
for your kind words about my musical  
efforts, and I hope to see beautiful  
London again, maybe next time under  
my own steam.

God Bless,

Herb Pedersen

I'd like to recommend a publication  
called 'Lou Reed and The Velvets' which  
has been written in its entirety, designed,  
laid out etc etc by Nigel Trevena. It's  
really like an issue of ZigZag which  
traces the history of the band and Lou  
Reed's career, and contains a lot of very  
interesting material. To give you a  
clearer idea of Nigel's intentions in pro-  
ducing it, I can do no better than to  
quote from his introduction. 'Really,  
this book can be whatever you want it  
to be. If you are a Velvets freak with  
long-service metals, just read it to fill in  
the gaps, if you are a 70's Reed fan,  
read it to discover where he's been. Or  
maybe you're just an average freak-in-  
the-street, well use it as an introduction  
to the Real Stuff. Partly a kind of hand-  
book to the music, it's also intended as a  
clarification of the facts, because for so  
long nothing was written about the Vel-  
vets, and when it finally was it was often  
misinformed, sensationalist or unsym-  
pathetic. I hope this book sets the facts  
straight. If I were to dedicate it to any-  
one, it would be to Lou Reed himself.  
Like the man said—some White Light  
returned with thanks.' You can get copies  
from Nigel, for 40p, postage included,  
at White Light, Manderly, Alexandra  
Road, Illogan, Redruth, Cornwall.

As you will have seen we have our first  
article on jazz this month, and having  
written that sentence, I wish I hadn't,  
because ZigZag's approach has always  
been that there aren't different cate-  
gories of music, only good music and  
bad music, so let me just say that we  
have our first article on a musician who  
doesn't play rock time, and uses im-  
provisation. One personal reason that  
I'm proud to have published it is that it

was written by John Fordham, ex Time  
Out colleague of mine and a writer  
whose knowledge of jazz (sorry, but I  
can't think what else to say) is astonish-  
ing, and whose style makes me feel  
ashamed to write, because of the clarity  
of his ideas, and the precision of his  
prose. But it would be interesting to  
know what you feel about it.

Which brings me on to my next beef—  
where are all the letters that used to arrive  
from readers? I can't believe that you  
don't think we should be doing things  
differently, and if you do write in and  
tell us what or how. And anyway, I love  
getting them. It sounds like an echo  
from 1967 hippy days, but in a very real  
sense this is your magazine as much as  
ours. You are of course welcome in the  
office at any time for a chat and a coffee,  
as well.

Albums of the month for me have been  
the Brinsleys (amazing), Mike Nesmith  
(probably won't get released here, but  
worth every penny of the import price—  
glorious record with a stunning version  
of 'Some Of Shelley's Blues', slower than  
the Nitty Gritty's, The Dead (weird, but  
worth persevering with), The Who (bril-  
liant, no praise can be too high). Albums  
that I wish I had heard, but am waiting  
for are Elton John, Tim Buckley, and  
Tim Hardin. Also, an album that should  
be out soon, and which I've heard a few  
times on tape, and which sounds really  
good is Linda Lewis' newie.

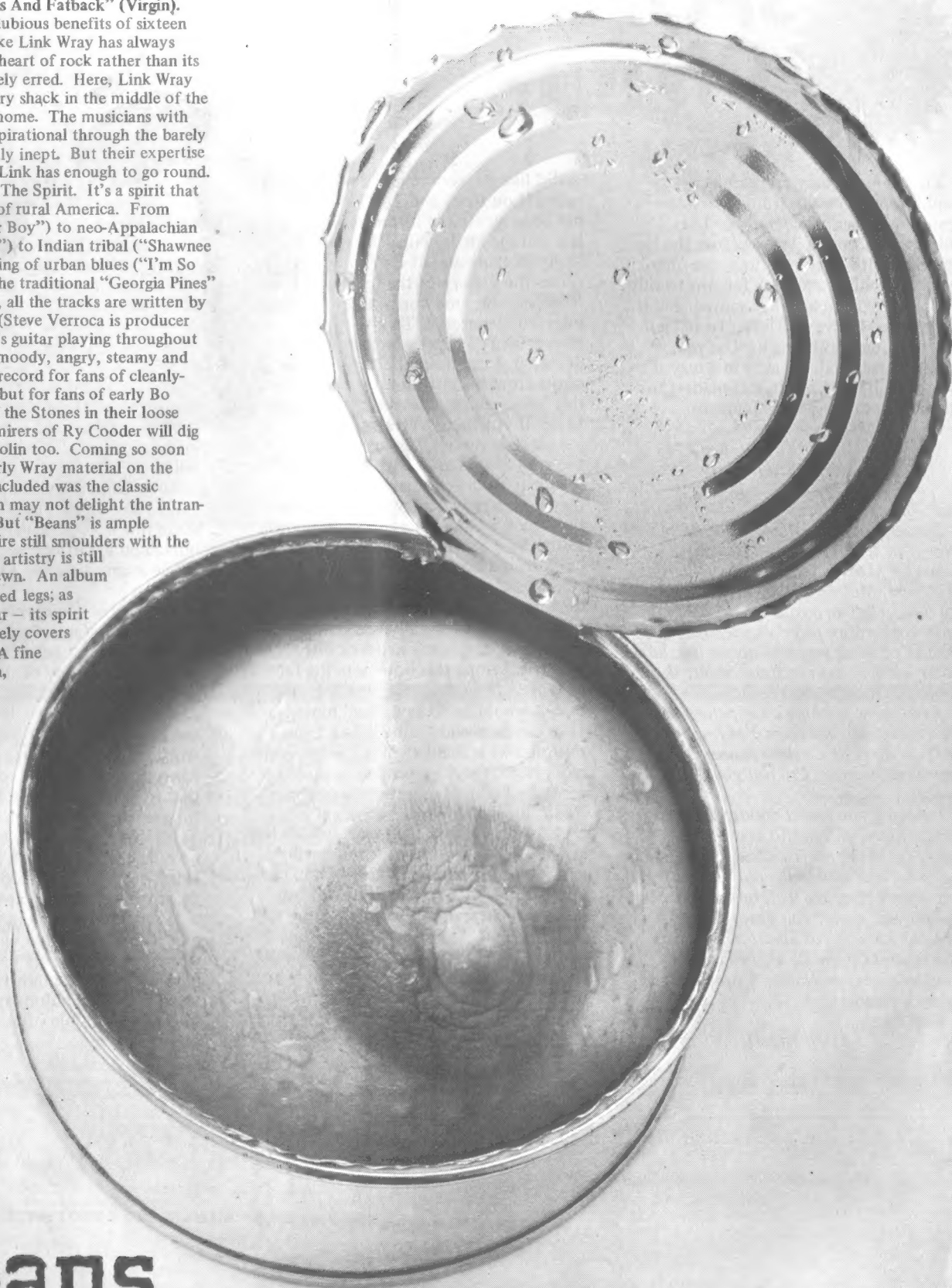
John and Pete are in California now,  
and I had a brief chat with them on the  
phone, and it would be cruel to tell you  
who they've done interviews with, but  
there is some fabulous stuff coming up  
in the next couple of months, so keep  
buying.

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**LINK WRAY: "Beans And Fatback" (Virgin).** Eschewing all of the dubious benefits of sixteen track, quad and the like Link Wray has always made straight for the heart of rock rather than its head. His aim has rarely erred. Here, Link Wray records in the legendary shack in the middle of the U.S. desert that's his home. The musicians with him vary from the inspirational through the barely adequate to the frankly inept. But their expertise is not too important, Link has enough to go round. What they all share is The Spirit. It's a spirit that captures every mood of rural America. From country blues ("Water Boy") to neo-Appalachian ("Beans And Fatback") to Indian tribal ("Shawnee Tribe") to the beginning of urban blues ("I'm So Glad"). Apart from the traditional "Georgia Pines" and "Take My Hand", all the tracks are written by Wray and Y. Verroca (Steve Verroca is producer and drummer). Wray's guitar playing throughout is excellent, by turns moody, angry, steamy and violent. This is not a record for fans of cleanly-picked electric guitar but for fans of early Bo Diddley roughness, of the Stones in their loose aggressive mood. Admirers of Ry Cooder will dig Mordical Jones' mandolin too. Coming so soon after the release of early Wray material on the Union Pacific label (included was the classic "Rumble") this album may not delight the intransigent purists much. But "Beans" is ample evidence that Link's fire still smoulders with the same intense heat; his artistry is still rough-hewn. An album that's as raw as chapped legs; as grizzly as a brown bear — its spirit is strong, its flesh barely covers its white-hard bone. A fine album. —Geoff Brown, Melody Maker.

"It's great" — Bob Harris



# Beans and Fatback

V2006

# LINK WRAY

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